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Bryan





RUTH ANNE



SECRET
FOR
SECRET LIAISON



"DON'T, DON'T COME IN!"

Page 249

RUTH ANNE

BY
ROSE CULLEN BRYANT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILL GREFÉ



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
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RUTH ANNE

I

RUTH ANNE put down the paper, reached her foot to the bell, hesitated, thought about it again and then rang.

The servant came at once, noiselessly, standing just at the door. Miss Barnard was occupied with absently tracing a pattern with the tip of her finger on the Sheffield tray which held the coffee things.

Mary wondered if she had forgotten to dust it.

"Did you ring, Miss Ruth Anne?"

"Yes, Mary. You may call Mr. Johnson at his house—you will find the number on the list—and say that Mrs. Barnard would like him to call at her residence on his way downtown this morning, and ask what time it will be convenient for him to be here."

Ruth Anne sipped her coffee, now quite cold, and took up the paper again; yes, the terrible thing, *that* terrible thing, taking up quite half of the first page in all its harrowing detail, boys, girls, women and babies dead and dying, *that* had to be faced and somehow conquered. She

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shuddered and shivered as the thing took hold of her again.

"Mr. Johnson will be here at nine-thirty."

"Thank you. You may take up Mrs. Barnard's breakfast now, Mary; wait—here are some letters." Her fear made her scrutinize them carefully before giving them to the maid, though there could not possibly be anything in them, there had not been time. "And when Dr. Hollander comes, ask him to wait down here and do not let Mrs. Barnard know he is here, you understand?"

"Very well, Miss Ruth Anne."

Miss Barnard rose from the table as Mary turned to go and called her back again.

"And Mary, there's a young man from the newspaper office, *The Herald*, I think, who just 'phoned. I shall have to see him, and Mr. Johnson of course, but no one else—not anyone to-day—we are out of town. And the telephone too: call up the local manager and tell her to cut off all incoming calls."

Mary went out softly; something terrible was the matter. She too looked over the letters carefully—but they told her nothing. Maybe it was in the paper. Miss Ruth Anne had kept the paper, she always sent it up with the tray—and she so quiet and frightened-looking, and had eaten nothing, not half of her coffee even. Well,

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Miss Ruth Anne might tell her; she could keep a secret, many she had kept in her twenty years with the Barnards, but the house was very dull these days—no deaths, no parties, nothing. If something *had* happened she had a right to know it.

Ruth Anne folded the paper, held it tight in her tense nervous fingers, walked up and down the length of the dining-room, stopping to look out into the cool gray autumn morning, paced back and forth in the hall, crossed into the library and opened a casement giving onto the bay. She rested her eyes for a long pause on the far dull blue horizon, aimlessly pushed an armchair nearer the window-seat, then went out slowly and up the stairs. She could think of nothing better than sending for Dr. Hollander; no one else could manage her mother. She passed her mother's room with soft steps and on to her own, tucked the newspaper into a drawer of her desk, turning the key, then back to her mother's door. Her hand was on the knob when she stopped, rubbed both cheeks vigorously until they burned, threw up her head carelessly and entered.

Mrs. Barnard was sitting up in her bed with many pillows. The uncompromising morning light revealed a thin pale face, soft-lined and heavy shadowed about the eyes and mouth. It was a high-bred and luxury-accustomed face that

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time seemed not to have touched at all in the years that must have brought her losses and sorrows. There was about the transparent quality of her skin, with the quick pink flush which came and went as she talked, a look of almost young and altogether delicate loveliness. Only her eyes had marvellous passionate depths, satisfied and quiet, serene and contemplative; some wonderful imperishable happiness was hers. The two women were alike in their softness and luxury and charm, alike too in the perfectly proportioned smallness of figure and the whole manner of confidence and poise, and yet in the daughter a subtle look of fierce passion in her gentleness; perhaps it was nothing more than the assertion of total proprietorship in this beautiful mother, the hovering about in the air of an influence protecting and shielding.

The older woman looked up from her letters as Ruth Anne in a tumult of emotions all hidden, greeted her with a duty kiss just below her vanity-cap and almost on the nose.

“Good morning, my dear!”

“The very tiptop of the morning to you, and a fine gray day too. Reading your letters and letting your breakfast all get cold as usual.”

Mrs. Barnard smiled and sipped her coffee peacefully, took up a bit of toast and laid it down again.

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"Where's the paper? Mary's getting so careless—these old servants do just what they like; I haven't a doubt she's reading it."

"I had it, mother. I must have left it in my room or somewhere," fussing with the torn envelopes and scraps strewn over the counterpane, gathering them into a tight little ball in her hand.

"Just like your father about the paper," she wailed. "He never thought anyone wanted it but himself."

"Now, mother——"

"I know, my darling, there never was anybody like your father and you'd defend him with the last drop of your blood, but I do want to know what the weather-man says."

"The weather-man says it's going to be colder and the geese must fly south as soon as they can. I hate this gray weather, I wish we were going where the sun shines," she spoke discontentedly, stubbornly. "I wish you hadn't gotten this idea of at-homes and dinner-parties for me in your precious head, mother dear."

"Why Ruth Anne, my darling, only yesterday you said you would like it, to settle down again. Why are you so restless?"

Mrs. Barnard sighed, Ruth Anne's desiring to do anything in opposition to her slightest wish was so extraordinary, almost bewildering.

"Well, I don't like it. I hate the winter and

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the cold, and you're never well in this climate; remember the terrible time you had last winter because we were too late in getting away. I know you're not strong enough to stand a season of operas, dinners and teas, and stupid clubs and lectures——”

Mrs. Barnard interrupted her daughter firmly: “Now Ruth Anne, don't let us have to begin all over and plan differently. I feel quite up to spending the winter here and seeing my old friends,—sometimes I think I may not feel like it another winter,—and you ought to have some social life. How will you ever get married, I'd like to know, we never stay anywhere long enough for a man to fall in love with you——”

“Mother!”

“I know you don't care, but I do, I'd like to see you married, I'm old enough to be a grandmother.”

“You a grandmother, what a plebeian ambition!” Ruth Anne laughed.

“Don't let us discuss it any more, it's settled.”

“No it isn't,” Ruth Anne was defiant, “I'll tell you what I've done. I've sent for Dr. Hollander and if he says you're well enough to stay the winter and entertain, all right. You've got to let him decide it. Please!”

“I've got to let him decide it and then you say ‘please’! I don't want you to give up so

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much for me," she moaned, "you'll never have any life of your own."

"I'm not giving up anything, and I don't want anybody but you," Ruth Anne cried desperately.

"Well, well, we'll see what the doctor says." Mrs. Barnard looked puzzled, and wistfully at her daughter, tightening her thin lips.

"Dearest mother, if you look like a martyr over it, I'll let you do anything you want, but do be reasonable." She leaned over and kissed her mother. "Do forgive me if I've been disagreeable." She pounced on a magazine: "Now we can go on with our serial. Shall I read?"

Mrs. Barnard took up her paper-knife and began ripping open letters, putting them all, cards, invitations, modistes' announcements, and bills into a heterogeneous heap for her daughter to sort and answer. Ruth Anne was reading very badly.

"You read as though you were reading obituaries; what's the matter? There's something the matter, and you won't tell me," she complained, "I wish you'd tell me——" Ruth Anne went on reading.

"You'd better do some shopping to-day. Madame Cecile has her opening. Order your new gowns, and see when she can make mine. It's quite time if we *are* to do any entertaining that we saw about some clothes——"

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Mary was at the door: "Excuse me, Mrs. Barnard, Miss Ruth Anne——"

"Thank you, Mary. There, Mumsy, read your old story yourself. I must tear myself away and order meats and telephone a dozen people—now eat all your breakfast or you never will be well." Outside the door her step changed, her whole body drooped, her face took on its anxious shocked white look as she went down the stairs and into the library.

Dr. Hollander was standing before the empty fireplace, the cold November light filtering through the lace and brocade draperies of the well-bred room, dimly outlining his face and figure as he waited for her. Dr. Hollander had come in response to her urgent telephone in the early morning. Ruth Anne did not know him very well; he had been their physician only in her mother's recent illness, when on returning from abroad they found their old doctor retired and this splendid younger man carrying on his work. He had taken wonderful care of her mother, masterful and inflexible, he had compelled obedience and filled them both with confidence and courage in a succession of dark hopeless days.

To begin speaking about her trouble was so difficult, so terrifying, that she was still mute when she stood before him, nor did he speak, so

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immediate was his recognition of tragedy when he saw her face. She reached out to him not the one hand of convention but generously and quite unwittingly both, and Dr. Hollander did the only thing possible to do with two trembling little white hands, which was to hold them and graciously wait her speech, bending slightly over her quivering face.

"Isn't it terrible?"

"Yes, it is terrible." His voice vibrated through the still room, he did not know what she was talking about, and his assurance that it was terrible seemed only to increase her despair and she sobbed aloud.

"Come, Miss Barnard, this won't do." Dr. Hollander felt the small hand contract within his while Ruth Anne bit her lips and shook her head. Suddenly she felt sustaining strength, coming to her out of this silent communion. She lifted her head and looked at him now, tearful still but almost in hand again.

"Do they know how many yet?"

Suddenly he knew.

"Yes; twelve so far dead, and twenty in St. John's."

"Some of them will die too?"

"It is possible."

Ruth Anne was silent again, and Dr. Hollander was watching her intently, and with vague appre-

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hension. Why Miss Barnard of Prospect Avenue No. 16 should be so passionately concerned over a boiler explosion and panic and fire in a nickel theatre on H Street was not within his understanding. She kept him in the dark still with—

“Then it is as bad as the papers say?”

“M-m, that depends on which papers,” he said grimly, “not half so bad as some and probably much worse than others. Many people of course went to their homes and will suffer from burns and possibly nervous shock whom we don’t know about at present; however, the visiting nurses will find them out soon. But why——” Her recurring sobbing stopped him.

“We—Mother owns the building—the building where——” she managed to bring out between sobs. Her eyes fell under his gaze, fell to her hands which he was still holding and which she now took away. In that high moment she forgot everything in the world but that he had been holding her hands all this time, how long she could not tell, she did not care; it was wonderful. What brought her back was his vibrant—

“You poor girl.” He led her to the window-seat, his arm about her shoulder—that was comforting, and it did not matter, it was like a father. But her hands, she brought them together to sense their touch, to assure herself of the fleshy reality of these wonderful hands which

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had gone on such spiritual adventures. Nothing in her life could ever touch those supreme moments when her hands were resting in his, not strange or unaccustomed but as though they had found a final resting place eternal as death itself. Dr. Hollander in the big chair was fixedly staring out of the window.

"You—you have seen them?"

"Yes, they were all brought to our hospital. How is Mrs. Barnard standing it?"

Ruth Anne's face went white and sharp again, her small hands clenched together.

"She *isn't*—I haven't told her—she—she mustn't know, Dr. Hollander."

The doctor went on staring straight ahead of him, his lips pursed out a bit.

"Why?"

"Why, you see—of course you know in her nervous condition it would——" Ruth Anne stopped, it was so horrible a thing to say, but she must say it or the man would never see.

"She would think she's *responsible*, poor little Mother who's never hurt anybody in her life. She couldn't stand it. You see, don't you?"

The doctor was silent a long time, his eyes narrowing, contracting, shutting out the gray expanse of water that seemed to come up to the very ledge of the window:

"And isn't she?" he brought out staggeringly.

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She shrank back into the curtains, her fingers unclosed, vibrated towards him, and retreated again to the cushions. He seemed to have shut her away by his impenetrable countenance in profile, his rugged figure severe and stern in every outline, his jaw hard, chin in air, brows frowning. What a terrible man he was. He made her feel weak, selfish, foolish, a thing of dust. She must take courage, he mustn't make her like that, afraid and in the wrong. Tense alarm in her tone she burst out:

"Of course she isn't. That isn't the question—I mentioned it because that is my great fear, that she will *think* it." She went on amplifying her thought. "When people are nervous and ill they imagine all sorts of things, you know that. People will be coming and asking questions and reporters wanting interviews—one is coming now—and perhaps pictures in the sensational papers. Oh, I know all about it and mother hates all that so, that vulgar publicity" (she was started now, it was going easier), "what I want is—will you—don't you think it would be best to send her away, far, somewhere away from it all, South or West or anywhere where they can't find us and talk to us about it. The Bermudas would do or even Cuba, it ought to be nice weather there now. Italy is too far."

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His silence was appalling, she must break it up, go on explaining.

"The reason I'm so frightened, something like this happened once with father and there was an investigation and the papers full of it, and he was so afraid for mother and took us right away and then came back and straightened it out."

"Are you going to straighten it out, as you say?"

"Mr. Johnson is coming, he will attend to that; of course those people will all have to be buried and taken care of, they will need money right away—yes, that will be attended to. But we must go right away—at once, *to-day*."

He didn't seem to be very ready to do what she wanted, he was slow to understand that the vital issue was her mother.

Dr. Hollander rose.

"Shall we go up?"

Ruth Anne was very much afraid of him now, something had removed him far away from her, she could not think how he had held her hands; and yet he had, she could feel their protecting warmth still within her.

II

It was spring when Ruth Anne came back alone from the Bermudas.

There had been months of rest to avert a nervous breakdown when day had succeeded day in colorless procession.

Now in New York she wanted to be diverted. She had gotten no farther than this desire in her recognition of the need of a rearrangement of her life. Her one occupation after her father's death had been an endeavor to make her mother happy. Now that vocation was gone. It didn't matter to Ruth Anne whether it was New York or St. Petersburg or London that she lived in, since there was no one and nothing to live for. She looked on at other people's varied and complicated existences and though she did not understand them, wondered if they were not worth while, if after all her highly centralized state of interest and affection was the sanest and safest way of life; if,—her dull brain struggled to achieve a figure,—if travelling the somewhat crooked streets and running into corners and turmoils with short vistas and never-ending change would not create an agreeable variation from the ever straight and narrow and well-kept

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path of her sheltered and unrealized womanhood. She would have time to see, oh, all the time there was from now to the end.

/ There must be some other purpose, some new destiny in store for her since her old occupation of love and service was taken away. This word "service" lingered in her brain; it seemed to be on many lips these days, it was heard everywhere, there must be something in it since it absorbed so many people. She would read about it and find out if it was really worth while. She might even begin soon, these empty days were so distracting. /

What movement might have claimed her, what work been found for her idle hands in the fast-running life of New York was a source of fascinating conjecture as she was whirled homeward on the limited in reply to Johnson's urgent telegram.

She was glad to be back and do the things that must be done and face the things that must be faced; anything was better than the palling inactivity of the past months.

As she went up the steps of her home she recalled the terror in which she had fled from it, the anxiety and haste of her flight as from a plague; her despair in her mother's hesitations, alternating with her security in the prevailing of Dr. Hollander's will over every opposition.

RUTH ANNE

Had he thought it right, that running away? He had done what she had asked. For her or for her mother? For her mother, of course. He had had an almost chivalrous devotion to Mrs. Barnard from the beginning, as everyone had always had.

The house was still and strangely empty. She walked about making mental note of what she would sell, or perhaps she would rent it furnished after all. Maybe she could live there later herself, but not now. She could not go into her mother's room; she could not bear that yet.

There was a fire in the morning-room and she sat in its warm glow and ate her supper which Mary brought. All her vague plans for a new life were forgotten. What was life anyway to make her suffer so? What was the good of it? Who was to benefit by it? Why? Why? Perhaps Dr. Hollander could tell her. She would see him soon and ask him. There must be great knowledge and wisdom where there was such strength and skill and sympathy. That was what she wanted, weak thing that she was,—sympathy; that was what he had given her when she had come to him, without a spoken word. She clasped her hands tight to her heart, she could feel the warmth of his in them now, making them tingle and glow on her bare neck. Yes, but he gave it to her as to a troubled child, just as to a child.

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She thought of a curious thing now as she had thought of it many times in the recent years; no man had ever treated her as a woman, ever made love to her, not one. She stood before the mantel and studied her face in the mirror. Why? Why? Her mother had married long before twenty-six. Was she so plain? Was there anything queer or repulsive about her? She was pale now and tired-looking, but she had not always been like that, and she would look quite well again soon, no doubt when she had proper exercise and normal life. She went on studying her face, loosing her hair, turning her head, posing in different attitudes. No, she was not as beautiful as her mother. She was like her but much plainer. A larger nose, a coarser chin, heavier lips, eyes less well-set; so many points of difference were in her disfavor. Yes, but even then this man, this superior and lordly man, had taken her hands and held them,—why was it?

The morning with Johnson was a difficult one. It appeared that the managing and settling of estates, probating wills, etc., was a most complicated and mysterious department of business, with many formal prayers and papers to sign and an almost endless number of typewritten documents. Many of Mrs. Barnard's real-estate holdings were heavily mortgaged, a great many transfers would be necessary to clear even a few properties sufficiently to yield a living income,

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and the strictest economy in management would be necessary for some time to insure that even. For years much of the Barnard property had been deteriorating in value and Mrs. Barnard had continued an expensive style of living after the warning had come that she was encroaching on her principal.

Ruth Anne signed a number of documents and took home the book containing the itemized and technically described inventory of property to study over and decide what she would wish to keep if she could. Johnson said residence property brought no income, so the Prospect Avenue house would have to be sold and the furnishings with it if possible. The sum from this sale ought to clear some of the other properties sufficiently to put them on an income-producing basis.

One property listed as valued at only a few thousand was bringing in a big rental; that was clear, it seemed; of course she would keep that. As she followed the descriptions she suddenly remembered that it must be the old homestead, a big yellow stone house in large grounds on a rickety West-End street. They had moved from there to the Prospect Avenue house when she was a small child, but she distinctly recalled the spacious old-fashioned interior, the large generous way of life there. Her mother had gone there as a bride, it would be interesting to keep it.

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Solitude and real desire to meet the situation wisely and sanely worked out some of Ruth Anne's problems in the succeeding weeks; at first bewildered, she gradually emerged from the avalanche of leases, mortgages, notes, and statements with an almost clear and business-like sense of her comparative poverty.

There was one safety deposit box still to be visited. She found the rental receipts and key together in an envelope in her mother's desk marked "Personal keepsakes and letters." After complying with some rigid formalities the box was in her hands in the little room at the vault. It yielded up a touching collection of almost worthless objects; some bits of old jewelry evidently her grandmother's, small strips of filmy, musty lace in a thin blue paper marked "Mother's wedding dress," a large bundle of old letters, and in a fresh white envelope a thick letter addressed to herself in her mother's superscription and evidently of recent date. Her puzzled gaze rested on this letter curiously. The feel of it was uncanny, its touch communicated a mysterious thrill of the unexpected, the absolutely unknown. What could her mother have to say to her now, being dead, that she could not say living? She laid it down reverently; must it not hold some wonderful thing?

The bundle of letters proved to be the love-

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letters of her father and mother, dated in the late seventies, and with them two small photographs, one of her mother which she had never seen, with the girlish virginal look of twenty, and another a small brownish one, the face of her father—immature, lean and smooth, with burning eyes direct and fearless. No wonder her mother had kept them. To Ruth Anne now they were fragrant of romance. She recalled her parents' beautiful life together, fulfilling the promise of this beginning, infinitely picturesque and perfect.

She fingered over again the old keepsakes sweet with tender recollections to her mother, and put them back one by one, and with her letter, *the* letter, securely in her bag, came out of the little room as from a temple into which she had intruded. Life was revealing its marvels to her. This miraculous letter, whatever it could contain, would be of the essence of mystery as though come from a far, far unknown land. She hurried home, clutching the black bag, fretting at the delay in the car, the slowness of Mary answering her ring, and the servant's tediousness in giving her tale of callers and messages.

"I shall be in Mrs. Barnard's room on the second floor for some time; do not disturb me, please, for any one."

Mrs. Barnard's room on the second floor had

RUTH ANNE

been the library until her long illness, when the drawing-room had yielded up some of its bareness to the gracious companionship of books and the large restful spaces of the upper room become the possession of the invalid. Many books still remained, and placed a definite stamp on the character of the room; Balzac, Hugo, Daudet, Dumas, Maeterlinck were cheek by jowl with Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mary Johnston, Hovey, Bliss Carman, Stephen Phillips, Drummond and Fréchette, Henry James—a cosmopolitan and democratic company. The etchings and photographs, cathedral interiors, temples, splendid heads remained, the beautiful dark wood and furniture. The pale sunlight of early spring lay on the rich coloring of the thick rugs, there was softness and harmony everywhere.

Ruth Anne closed the door. It was the first time she had come into this room since her return. She lighted the beautifully laid fire, pulled up a great arm chair and sat down before it. This was what her entrance into the room had been reserved for, this rich and miraculous experience of hearing her mother's last words. She held the letter in her hands hesitating to break the spell of expectancy, the charm of uncertainty which held her. The letter bore date of the previous summer.

RUTH ANNE

MY DEAR CHILD:

Since Dr. Hollander has told me that at best I can live a year and probably a few months only, I have thought without ceasing of the essential things to be done in this short time, and while there are matters of business I should attend to, I will not, because you will have time and I hope strength to do these things for yourself when you are alone.

This great thing I could put off and tell you some day near the last, if the end came not too swiftly, and if I had the courage.

The bundle of letters will tell you of our romantic youth, your father's and mine, the full and perfect giving of each other, so untouched by the world, so ignorant, so blessedly ignorant. I wish you would read them sometime. With the knowledge of all the things we were not, and all the things we were falsely, and pretended to have, and the widely different things we each did have in our hearts according to our desire, there will still remain for you the proof of the one good thing we had in our lives and abundantly for three blissful blessed years. Your father's picture is there as he was then, lean, fine, glowing with the splendid promises of youth untouched by sin, by temptation, by the grime of the world, abounding in hope and faith in himself.

He went away to a western city on some railroad business, he had been appointed general

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counsel at that time for a big western road. I was ill, you were a great voracious baby and I was perhaps occupied too much with my self and you. When he came back something told me I had lost my husband; I didn't know just what it was, some lack of intimacy or candor, some demonstration that failed to strike the high note of our usual relation. He went away again, this time with no pretence of business taking him. In a few months there was a great scandal and divorce, my husband kept out of publicity in some way and few people knew it. He had made a great deal of money in railroad transactions at that time and I suppose money did it. The lady came later to live here. No immediate word was ever exchanged between us referring to this matter. To each other as to the world I was the smiling wife and happy mother, he the most courteous and devoted of husbands, about whom trailed only the faintest wisps of uncredited gossip which finally faded out in the clear atmosphere of his chivalry and fidelity. A new deference and formality marked all our relations now. He wished me to know he appreciated my taking the inevitable in this thoroughbred manner. He gave me at that time the wonderful string of pearls I am leaving to you. For myself, my pride which would not let me down in his presence for one moment kept me before the world, a gay, dancing, entertaining, dining, beautifully-gowned

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matron, and we played the game for the world, for the family doctor, for you, for the servants really much less well than for ourselves.

Of course he had his outlet, the other woman. She kept him amused and satisfied and sane, while I had only you and my heart full of bitterness. It had been taken away from me too soon, the wonderful experience called conjugal love, I had not had enough of it. I was hungry for it still with a terrible hunger. I thought first you would fill my heart; you could not, only a man could do that. I saw sterile barren years stretching before me, my youth devoured by this heart-hunger. And then the undreamed-of thing happened. I fell in love.

With a man ten years older than I, a man of the world, a man of position and distinction, a man rumored to be most unhappy. His wife lived abroad, no one knew why, but there was continual talk and conjecture about it. I began by being sorry for him, our positions were so similar; I finished by loving him with a passion more strong, more mature and overwhelming than I had known with your father. I had now had five years of peace-destroying unrest and misery.

The man, we will call him R——, said never a word to me; his silences, his reserve, his sternness, his severity were all I had; yet I knew my love was conquering, that he must love me. My desire and my need were so great, they were

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irresistible. I filled my imaginings with him in the long nights alone in my bed. I felt myself in his arms, filling every need of his, it was maddening, unbelievable, the intensity of my passion for him. I have not told you how splendid he was intellectually and physically, a sort of pagan god in his grandeur of mind and body.

I could bear it no longer. I went to his house—it was not far from ours on the Avenue. I went in dinner dress with a light wrap about me. I had telephoned to learn whether he was at home and would see me, and after some hesitation he had answered yes.

He admitted me himself,—he must have sent away his servant,—and ushered me into his study.

I don't remember what I said. I put my arms about his neck—I told him I loved him. I should die if he did not love me. He must take my love, he was alone, starving for love, I would give him myself, all, everything. I kissed him again and again, standing on the tips of my toes to reach his lips, his lofty head not one inch lowered. I suppose he could stand it no longer; he put his hands on my shoulders and set me down in a great chair, wrapped my cloak about me, covering my bare bosom, then backed to the farthest wall of the room, folded his arms, looked at me, his heavy face set and hard.

“You must go home now as soon as you can. No one must know you have been here. Go now.”

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Again I begged him to kiss me just once, I wound my arms about him.

He took me up in his arms like a child and set me down in the chair again.

He was so terrible now I dared not move again. One last mute appeal I made, my soul and all of my desire fixed upon him: I would make him say yes or no, I would not go until he did.

"You don't know," he said in a still quiet voice, "a man does not take the honor of a woman——" He looked down on me as I burned, waiting, then his voice softened to the timbre of music.

"—He loves," he finished.

He still stood away from me as though fearing my touch.

"You are a strong man," I said.

"You have helped me to be until now," he answered.

"Am I to have no word, no kiss all my life?" I pleaded.

He shook his head, still leaning against the wall. He was like a great rock against which I was beating, bruising my hands.

"I shall love you until I die," I said. He did not answer and I went out.

When I reached home your father was waiting for me in my room, a place he never came.

"I am sorry you went out alone; I would have gone with you to call upon R—— if you

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had asked me," he remarked quietly, and I knew that in some subtle way he knew.

After that his attentions, his thoughtfulness, tenderness and care were marked by a shade more of fineness, of delicacy and courtesy than before. The irony of this did not touch me, for both my life and my honor were out of his keeping in the safe hands of my knight.

I was living the romance of my life. Every time I closed my eyes I could see that strong splendid man driven to his last defence, his back against the wall, possessing himself in victory and conquering, for I knew from the moment I touched him in that mad embrace that he loved me as I loved him, more than his soul, more than any earthly or heavenly thing; and the knowledge kept me sweet and beautiful and young and happy all the years that love lived in my heart, transforming everything that touched me.

Your father's indifference to me was one of those strange inexplicable sex caprices that happen in men's and women's lives and make them intolerable to madness, but it gave me my great love. I fulfilled the purpose of my being as only a woman does who has known a passion absolutely unselfish.

Go out and seek your life, do not wait for it to come to you. The adventures you achieve on your quest are worth while. Mere sordid

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misery will come to you abundantly sitting and waiting, but not the precious things; the great things are to be struggled for deathlessly. If I had not gone out that night my life would be all barren years full of the bitter ashes of disappointment and futile suffering. It was my Grail; I went forth seeking the cup and my hand was suffered to touch it.

There is the potency of miraculous things seething all about us; we must make them our own if we would truly *live*.

He who would have adventure wait upon him must go forth alone unattended, with exalted purpose, and the treasures of the earth await his claiming.

The love you are to have, which is your portion and your destiny though it may be too your sorrow and your death, will come to you as a devouring insatiable unconquerable thing, a torturing agonizing breathless terror possessing you.

YOUR DEVOTED MOTHER.

The last page of the letter fluttered from Ruth Anne's fingers and fell to the floor.

Suddenly something gave away at her heart. She lay her head on the desk beside her and burst into a tumult of weeping. Anybody in the house could have heard her; it was a terrible outpouring of heart-rending sounds appalling in their misery and pain.

III

THE important person with the elaborately marcelled head rose from the typewriter.

"Have you an appointment with Dr. Hollander?"

"No, but I must see him."

The blonde person lifted an eyebrow inaudibly.

"He is full until four and he is leaving early," she posed.

"I will wait; Barnard is my name."

"Prospect Avenue?" She filled out the card with obvious protest and dropped it through the slit and into the next room.

The office was a solemn portentous place; a grave middle-aged man was waiting, immersed to his eyes in a scientific periodical, a timid little woman came in softly, her black veil thrown back revealing her wrinkles, a smartly dressed woman bringing a faintly perfumed aura sailed up to the desk, her leathery face burned red from golf in the March winds, a working-woman with stubby fingers ungloved showing dirty nails; all these received a slight nod from the important person, evidently had appointments, for she shot their cards in without query and in succession shot them in too, one to one mysterious inner

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room, one to another, but wherever she sent them they never came back, it was as though a minotaur swallowed them up. It was vastly entertaining; she was glad she had had to wait.

"Dr. Hollander will see you now," announced the important person, "and I'm very much surprised that he does," intimated the eyebrow again.

Dr. Hollander was signing letters as she entered. He rose and shook hands formally and with much reserve.

"You are very patient."

"I didn't mind waiting in the least." She sat down.

"When did you return?" he asked with a slight softening of manner.

"Oh, some time ago. I've been very busy," she added as though apologizing for not having come sooner, then seeing her blunder she finished, "I had been very ill before I came back."

"Yes?" interrogatively.

"Yes, I—I went to pieces. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you—— How would I know——" How quickly she could plunge into deep waters, this strange girl.

"Yes, but you did know, you told mother," she flung at him.

"Well and what do you think—that it would have been easier for you if you had known?"

"No I'm afraid it would have been harder,

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but," she pursued the thread of argument once grasped, "but why did you think it would make it easier for her?"

"But I didn't." She was silent.

"Then why do it at all?" she brought out finally.

"She made me. She pinned me down. There was something wonderful about her, you couldn't lie to her."

"Do you lie to anyone?" Quite away from the main line of argument she was pursuing a dim by-path.

"Oh, yes, often." He gave her this quite openly in the bright light of a wide space, as it were. "As a matter of fact if I had not told her, I should have told you. Someone always has to be told as soon as we know."

"That is the ethics of the profession?"

He nodded.

"I suppose other doctors have—have not always told me the truth, that is why I have so little faith in them. I always thought they didn't know."

He laughed, "We don't often know. So you've had little faith in doctors?"

"As doctors,—oh, not as men."

"Now?" He followed her up quickly.

"Now I shall have more faith in them as doctors and less as men."

"You are delicious, but really I wish you

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could see that it's all in our day's work." His tone was serious again.

"Perhaps I shall some day. I am going into a work that will bring me closely in touch with your profession."

"Not social service?" he ventured with quick interest.

"No. Nursing."

"But you're not a nurse."

"No, but I'm going to be one."

"I don't believe you," shaking his head.

Ruth Anne tried to get down from this high tone of banter. Every word was serious to her, densely heavy with import.

"Why?"

"Well, you'll have to lie to them too. A nurse never tells the truth to any one but the doctor and not to him unless her ethical conscience is developed to the last notch."

"I shall take care of only the very poor; surely I can tell them the truth about themselves. They are not so——"

"Weak. No, that's true."

She flushed. "I mean they are used to hardships and able to bear them better."

"Isn't that being stronger then?" He had her quite fast this time and smiled. "But seriously, you are thinking of becoming a nurse?"

"Yes, indeed."

RUTH ANNE

"With your money you will be able to do a great deal."

"But I haven't any money, at least very little, hardly enough for the present to live upon. I must do something."

"I didn't know. That is quite different then, it becomes a question of considering thoughtfully. A vocation is a different thing from a pastime." His manner changed suddenly from that of polite tolerance to one of deep interest. His long silence told her that. She knew his silences.

"Isn't there greater opportunity for service in nursing work than any other for a woman?" Ruth Anne reddened. She felt sure her question sounded self-righteous and priggish, but she must tell him why. She was desperate in her eagerness. "I want the blessing of service. Is there a better way than this? I want to know."

The doctor still did not answer for the space of a minute; his eyes were fixed toward the window looking down on the smoky city beneath; he saw a pale face with an unquenchable fire in it, a cloud of gray veil about the head.

Ruth Anne could not see the vision but she knew it was there; his face was like a fasting anchorite's gazing on his living Madonna.

"I should say you might try the City Hospital," he said, still standing and turning toward her with a smile.

RUTH ANNE

"Why not St. John's?" she asked quickly. That was his hospital, his in the sense of its being the place where he sent his fashionable patients.

Dr. Hollander shook his head slowly, definitely, his lips pursed out, his eyes far away again.

"St. John's is not the place for you. Do you want to learn to be ladies' maid to capricious women, to draw the shade at just the right height, to set the screen to keep away an exact amount of air, to put on pink bows and then take them off and put on blue ones, to dawdle and coax and cajole and flatter, and manicure nails and write notes to their lovers and lie to their husbands? God! that isn't what you want." He was walking about the small room now, speaking vehemently, contemptuously.

Ruth Anne was dumb with the joy of having stirred his placid surface with the splash of her one little unconscious stone; she scarcely breathed. Perhaps her very silence calmed him.

"No. The opportunity for service is in a charity hospital, moreover—and this is irrefutable—the best training both technical and practical that is to be obtained in the city is given in that boss-ridden, graft-infected old fire-trap. There will be a great deal to stand. Do you know what it means, the discipline, the restraints, the hours of work? Go and get their catalogue. You know you must be absolutely free, no ties, no obliga-

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tions of any sort. It is three years of the hardest kind of work."

Ruth Anne's face glowed with fine enthusiasm. "You can't make it too hard; that is what I need, it will be good for me."

"I hope so." He shook hands and held the door open, giving her a rare smile and nod of approval.

Out of the magic of his presence she went with the consciousness of high resolve, new courage and new confidence. The common things were the fine things, it seemed; the things of high ambition and achievement were the things wrought out of grime and mire and suffering.

Dr. Hollander's words thrilled her to the quick perception of this place of horrors. It was into that world she was to adventure; in those aisles of suffering was to be her work, in the lives of wretched people the perfection of her exalted mission.

All of this had crossed and recrossed her vision in vivid flashes as he talked. She was obsessed with the craving for self-sacrifice.

Ruth Anne's fine appreciation of dramatic quality led her to seek the situation underlying the scene with Dr. Hollander, the scene which had reached its climax when she saw that he was seeing a vision in the gray expanse below him.

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What was his innermost being—what influences had molded him to his gigantic stature? She recalled and pieced together all the bits of talk she had heard about him. It was not much, but it led her to think he was a man much talked about by women, a man who created consciously or not about him, an atmosphere of conjecture and mystery.

She vaguely remembered now some of this talk, a conversation between her mother and a caller the previous year. She could pick it out in dialogue somewhat after this fashion:

“How do you manage, Evelyn, without dear old Dr. Davis?”

“Very well, seemingly. One tires of an old doctor after a while, don’t you think—he learns too many of one’s weaknesses. I have Dr. Hollander.”

“Isn’t he a dear!”

“All of that,” mother smiled.

“He’s the most wonderful man, came here from the West somewhere and making them all sit up; he has it all his own way along the shore. Every one is mad about him.”

“Really, why?”

“Why, can’t you see, Evelyn? He’s so stunning to look at and fills one with fear like the Almighty.”

Mother laughed.

“He doesn’t make me afraid.”

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"It isn't 'afraid.' Awe, that's what it is, he's such a majestic creature. My daughter—Caroline, you know—simply worships him. He took care of her in the hospital and she says she couldn't have lived without him—none of us counted. She simply lived for him. He was so virile, so life-giving——"

"Isn't Caroline—as I remembered her she seemed a strange, sensitive child——"

"No, Caroline is like everyone else, women are simply mad about him."

"But I thought him a married man——"

"That's it, that's what's so fascinating—no-body——"

Ruth Anne had heard no more. She hated the nakedness of one's private life, the indecency of bare motives and causes. She liked people bound, swathed about like Orientals, those wise people with the folds of their garments multitudinous in line and color; then if a furtive wind sometimes revealed a line of limb or bosom, so much the more wonderful: but to tear away all one's clothing, that was monstrous. It struck her now while she was idly pursuing this figure of clothing, how wonderfully her mother had worn hers and what marvellous clothing it was to have looked well through the years and still keep some beauty and charm. And her father's, too—it had been so dignified and worn with a grace strange and inconceivable, though she re-

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membered it chiefly as of a rich fineness and shade that fitted well about him in shapely folds.

She was drawn back again presently to the contemplation of the fascinating situation which increased in interest as she viewed it from various points of contact. Here was a man immersed in immense affairs of civic and human welfare, boards of hospitals, political leagues, medical schools, tuberculosis, the social evil; she saw his name associated prominently with all these things. All these things of dominant interest he touched closely. The scope of his work and influence was without end; he lived as it were in an endless contiguity of great things.

How had she dared to take his time to consider her poor personal affairs, she sighed. Well she had dared, and it had been worth while.

Ruth Anne did not realize then that if she succeeded in her work it would be more to show him, to prove to him, her sincerity and ability than to prove her fitness for the work itself.

She could not wait to begin; it must be now while the spell of this burning desire was upon her. She was in feverish haste to blot out the selfish, empty past and fill the undreamed-of vastnesses of the future with work that was the meaning of life, service, duty accomplished. Oh, the foolish wasteful madness of people rushing about in search of happiness, clutching wildly at every elusive excitement and amusement, making

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up the sum of life of the gaudy useless baubles, passing its splendors by. Ruth Anne dreamed on and on in the bareness of her boarding-house room that night. It was as impalpable and fine as are the romantic dreams of young girlhood, but she did not suspect the romance, she set about to make it real.

Outside her agent's office, waiting for the elevator one morning, Ruth Anne felt curiously a glance of recognition; a man standing near her hesitated, uncertain whether to speak or not, when her puzzled and somewhat restless glance met his.

"How do you do?" She extended her hand, grappling madly for his name,—“Mr. Hunt,”—she said smiling.

“Miss Barnard——” They were in the elevator now being shot down at breathless speed and he waited to speak until they reached the street.

“—You are very good to remember me.”

“I couldn't forget your kindness,” she murmured.

“When did you get back?”

“Early in March. I was in New York some time. Isn't New York wonderful?”

“Great old town.”

Ruth Anne smiled. They had reached the corner but John Hunt did not wish to be dismissed.

“May I walk on with you?” She nodded acquiescence.

RUTH ANNE

"Down the Avenue. It's so gay." The talk was choppy owing to crowds of shoppers and difficulties at crossings.

"How is Mrs. William Hunt?"

"Mrs. Hunt is as usual, racing about in her limousine," he laughed. "I am sure she would want to call if she knew you were in town."

"I should be very glad to see her, I'm sure," she returned cordially, "only I've no place to ask her to. I've given up our house and I'm going into a hospital to learn nursing."

"Indeed, that's getting to be quite a fad, so many young women of fashion going into it. St. John's, I suppose."

"Oh no, the City Hospital."

"Impossible!"

"No, quite possible," she assured him.

"Are you joking, Miss Barnard?" he pursued gravely.

"Oh, I'm quite in earnest. What is the matter?"

"I can't think of you with those paupers, it's too horrible."

"I know it's terrible, that's why I'm going there."

"I suppose one may come to see you sometimes."

"Yes, often. I am sure I shall be lonely—that is if pupils are permitted visitors, I don't know."

RUTH ANNE

"I can manage that, I've a pull. I'm in politics, you see."

"No—what?"

"The Legislature if I make it. I hope to go in on a reform movement."

"How splendid! I hope you make it," she said earnestly, holding out her hand. "I'm going in here—good-by."

She could bear to talk no longer; it had been a great trial to see him, but she could not be ungracious and pass him with a bow, for it was as she said, she could never forget his kindness and that of his brother and sister-in-law in Bermuda the preceding winter. They had done everything for her so generously and courteously, there were formalities of various sorts to be attended to and the men did these while Mrs. Hunt gave up days to her before she surrendered to the trained nurse. Then she supposed they had gone. She was very ill and she had not seen them again, but she had sometimes wondered about them, wished she might see them again, they had been so good and kind, so energetic and prompt with their services; and he came out of a clear sky, the one of them who had interested her most just when she was venturing into the world, eagerly awaiting—nay, seeking boldly—new and strange and vital experiences. Was her seeking spirit sending out imperative calls inviting strange adventures?

IV

THE Hunts were a numerous and parasitic family, all occupied with large affairs, chiefly those of making others of various classes and stations in life work for them; not without, it must be admitted, a reasonable compensation—but always for the greater glory of the Hunts.

William, the eldest of the brothers, had in years past in his keen middle-class mind conceived the possibilities of power that could lie in the hands of four men cohesive, working toward political preferment in a city always corrupt, dominated first by one party and then by another. They all played the game in the way best suited to the resources in each one's hand; and to change the figure, they were a small, compact, perfectly assembled machine always running smoothly and quietly and efficiently. William Hunt was nominally in real estate. He had been alderman for ten terms, which would have been consecutive except for one presidential year when a strike had gotten his voters muddled. But for the most part he owned and controlled and could deliver five thousand votes.

John had determined early, even before entering Harvard, that he would not be a city hall

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politician. He would from the outset fix his eyes on higher things, the highest things; there was no reason at all why there should be any stopping place for him—the governorship, the senate, the national machine, all of the biggest things. The others had all gotten what they wanted; he who had started later, on the foundations they had laid, with youth and an altogether better equipment at his service, could surely win. The assembly was the stepping-stone—he must have the practical experience in detail of manipulation that a place at the state capital would give him. Among the mediocre, middle-class men who made up the body of the legislature, he ought to be able to establish a personal following. To become first a power in state politics was an absolute essential.

It was important to get in just now, as weighty issues, financial and political, were being held in abeyance until the make-up of the legislature was determined. Only the big politicians and the corporations concerned knew of these issues and what they wanted was a smooth quiet campaign with no embarrassing issues or pledges.

The good safe question of reform was as ever the issue which kept the spot-light, that loomed big in the eyes of the people on the centre and well to the front of the stage, while behind the scenes and in the wings were crouching and hid-

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ing the big shadowy powers which were to do battle with the law-makers of the state.

But in the present campaign, the real issues were held back, the real battle-figures concealed behind the thick accoutrements of those "supers," purification of primaries, enactment of a ten-hour law for women, child labor, minimum wage, state endowment of technical schools,—oh, any number of necessary and useful measures were brought into the picture and grouped about that perennially youthful and fascinating creature, "Reform," who had brought victory chained and struggling to perch with semblance of joyousness on so many ignoble and infamous banners.

John Hunt could juggle with catchwords and phrases and slogans so handily that he almost convinced himself that he meant to reform the morals of the state; he was carried away with his own enthusiasms, he believed in himself and he believed in the game.

He had said quite casually to Ruth Anne that he was going into politics, as though it were altogether a new venture, an untried, unsought, unexplored field for him, and the man in the street would have said the same thing; a split in the party, the periodic spasm of morality, a chance for a strong man to go in and win. He counted on his virile youth, the splendid show he could make of his fine enthusiasms, the brilliant magnetism of his stage presence, the ready eloquence

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of his half-Irish wit. All these were to help and yet it was going to be hot work. They could just see, the four Hunts, how he could make it.

Leaving Ruth Anne he walked back to his office, impatiently now, striding along the street to where his car had been waiting, and drove to headquarters. His law partner was there reading proof of some literature, his brother William (his campaign manager) making suggestions as Stoughton read on. They worked until six and drove home to an early dinner. It was the last week before election and he was to deliver two speeches and later go to a club meeting at Symphony Hall.

All through dinner he was deep in discussion of plans with his brother and did not speak of his meeting Miss Barnard until after he was dressed in immaculate linen and freshly pressed business suit waiting for his car to take him to the Gymnasium for his nine o'clock speech. His sister-in-law was fluttering about, making the men comfortable as usual with armchairs, cigars, cigarettes, ash-trays, magazines, all the after-dinner accessories of the informal family evening in the living-room.

"Say, Edith,"—he cursed his cigar and lighted it again,—“you remember those Barnard people at the Imperial last winter?” He tried to make his tone and manner casual.

“You're overdoing it,” said Edith laughing,

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"you know we'd hardly forget the few nice people we succeeded in meeting the whole winter. Have you seen her?" He went on to talk of Ruth Anne, easily now. The car honked outside.

"That's the kind of a girl you ought to marry," said Edith turning down the collar of his overcoat and patting it into place with the persuasive touch she would give a puff on her own well-groomed head.

"Why don't you?"

"I'm going to try." He banged the door and followed his brother out.

Mrs. Hunt walked about restlessly, deeply conscious of her looks, of the trailing gown about her feet, of her small white hands encrusted with jewels, of the richness of the furnishings about her. She surveyed it all in a chance mirror and sighed. It was so near the real thing, in fact it was too good to be real, as climbers' clothes and houses always were. Why couldn't she look as though she had worn bare shoulders and jewels for generations?

With a shrug she turned again to John's affairs: "There's no doubt it would help all of us. It's time he cut out this actress business and settled down. He's too obvious about it, anyway; making an engagement for her to receive me, if you please, when she was playing here last winter,—she might be a duchess. It's his pose to

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assume that she's a proper person. I wonder," she shook her little head, "No, I ought to know these Hunts by this time, I've grown gray in their service. He can't be in earnest, it wouldn't do, he must know it. He does know it, of course."

She waited up for the men until after one. Her husband came in a trifle unsteady and very tired. He began an apologetic explanation which she cut short.

"I know, dear, you had to take a drink; there are only five days more of it, I can stand it,—mud baths next week, mind."

"You're an angel," he muttered.

John's eyes followed his brother affectionately. "Great old brick, Bill, you should have seen him get them together to-night—all in his fist like that," he gestured forcibly, as he threw himself into a chair.

"Ede, how did you know I wanted a talk with you?"

"Oh, I always know; besides, it's a pleasure, you're so refreshingly young. The others are getting a little old—of course I'm not—but you, you're," she hesitated for the phrase and finished, "my great help." She looked at him, big, relaxed, sprawled out in her armchair.

"Well, how did it go?"

"Well enough. I think it's going. God, how the costs are running up."

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"Ten thousand? That was Bill's figure."

"About that." He flicked his cigarette into the grate and lighted a fresh one. "Funny, isn't it?"

"Meeting Miss Barnard?—fortunate rather."

Mrs. Hunt was sitting on a low stool before the fireplace in a favorite attitude which her smallness made possible, clasping her knees with her hands, peering steadily into the depths of the grate, her eyes on the dying glow of the last red coals. Thus intimately she was very fond of her husband's youngest brother; his nearness made her conscious of his dominant masculinity as a mother is conscious of that wonderful element in the kiss of her adult son.

She was thinking that Miss Barnard must have stirred him in some strange unusual way, he was so reticent of speech in this desired, and waited-for, talk.

"How is she?"

"Badly as to health, but finer and more"—he stopped meditatively—"more *alive*, with the real thing, nothing seems to express it in words; you'd know if you saw her. It's in her face and voice and eyes. Ye Gods, they really look at one now. They melt and burn and ask and desire and understand—it's all there, but bless you, she doesn't know it." He leaned forward, his hands clasped now. "I've seen it before, often,—the knowledge, the desire, the understanding,—but

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not so new, so unconscious. Some wonderful experience has come to her. Not her mother's death; death subdues and softens. It's something else. She has seen the splendors of the universe in one vivid flash, and the light of it is still in her eyes. She was much less formal and more direct and yet more elusive, more simple and yet more subtle. Hang it, Ede, you must know, what was it?"

Edith rose and yawned.

"What a foolish innocent boy it is, with all its wisdom and wickedness. It's just that she's suddenly realized that she's a woman. Something has revealed the illimitable possibilities of a woman's life to her," Edith mused; "it would be interesting to know just what her particular experience has been."

"You are such a wise little person, perhaps you can tell me whether every woman has these revelations of the powers and glories of her sex?"

"No, sometimes we live on, waiting, waiting."

They talked a long time about Miss Barnard and the nursing plan and the City Hospital, Mrs. Hunt recalling that she was on the Auxiliary Board for the training school of the hospital. She sent her dues but had never been either to the hospital or school. She understood it was all hopeless, and then she went back to her first idea

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and spoke of it, how it would help his position at the capital next year possibly, to take a house for the session and entertain, establish headquarters for party organizations and combinations under the pleasant guise of the social courtesies which a woman like Miss Barnard was especially fitted to manage. She could already see herself assisting at functions in Paris gowns, becoming a power.

"The devil! So that's all you want. I would see that we got that in any case," he rose. "I want *her*," savagely.

Edith laughed.

"You'll have to play pretty straight, I'm afraid," she warned.

"The game can be played straight, I tell you, if you know how——"

"Oh, I don't mean politics; I mean Rebecca Hayden and Marjorie Middleton."

"Oh, hell!" was what he left her with as she crept shivering to bed.

V

THE nurses' home stood on a side street from the City Hospital and at right angles to it, across a little park, an unkempt open place with two or three stunted trees, patches of burnt grass interspaced with the bare earth surrounding the decrepit and awry benches where visitors to the hospital crossed over to wait when the visiting hour was approaching, and the stone curbing about the doorway already filled. The old hospital had outgrown its original plot of ground and was now walled about for squares with high buildings; private hospitals, some prosperous and more down-at-heel, medical schools of standing both recognized and questionable, students' dormitories and homes all in friendly intimacy with the closely huddled-together buildings for the insane, for tuberculosis, for contagious diseases, and within sound of the never-ceasing crying of the babies in the children's ward. Farther away were undertakers' chapels and places of business with caskets invitingly displayed, florists' shops with gaily colored wreaths and harps and pillows in fern-banked windows, artificial-limb and articulated skeleton shops, their gruesome windows showing the most attractive models, free

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dispensaries with their lines of tired haggard women and clinging children at basement doors, drug stations, medical bookstores, X-ray laboratories, cheap restaurants and lunch counters, foul-smelling fruit and ice-cream stands, all of the thousand elements of the elaborate and sordid processes of living and dying; dirty, congested, inadequate, disgraceful—and yet all made worth while, beautified and illuminated by the work going on within these high walls; the study of problems of life-saving and health-saving, of eugenics; of vivisection, researches into the origin of life and disease, into the intricate and illimitable potentialities of the elusive electron, compilation of data of experimental surgery, preparation of serums, culture and contemplation of multitudinous bacilli, the testing of marvellous apparatus and theories of treatment and procedure in every department of medicine and surgery, all carried on here patiently, unceasingly, with breathless interest and with a fine and high enthusiasm, by thousands of men and women.

The streets unswept save by foul clouds of germ-laden dust, reeking with the sweat and odors of hundreds of diseased ones going to and fro in the heat and humidity of the midsummer day, yet everywhere, in every basement, behind every gray wall, in every class-room and amphitheatre, miraculous things were going on, proc-

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esses determining the life of future generations and the destiny of the race.

Long rows of beds, bandaged heads and bodies, limbs and backs in casts, feet suspended, legs weighted, hot and cold packs,—plaintive voices, voices in prayer, thin fingers slipping beads, the agony of the mother, the heaven-sent cry of the new-born, soft foot-falls, the touch of skilful fingers bringing ease or pain,—mysterious tubes and retorts, cryptic codes of orders, the measuring of fluids, the weighing of drugs, the transfusion of blood, the counting of corpuscles, the hypodermics of serums and opiates, the thousands of units of antitoxin doing their silent work,—the deadly intubations, the tubbings, the normal salts, the ice-bags on hearts and heads, the hot-water coils, the quick passing from hand to hand of scissors and forceps and sponges, of retractors and needles and sutures, the reek of ether and chloroform, of iodoform dressings, the struggle against anæsthesia, the horrible awaking and the blessed not-awaking: all these were there.

It was a hot July day that Ruth Anne ventured into this quite new world which was to be her home during months of strenuous work.

A conquering, devastating wave of heat was sweeping the city, the narrow street was breathless, the buildings hot, the melting pavement gave her a sense of dizziness as her feet sank into the

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soft asphalt; the street was very quiet except for a car whizzing by on the other side of the park; these were the hours of work behind those walls, the still heavy hours of late morning just before noon.

Something of all this richness in the atmosphere of the street, the feel of its abounding yet hidden activities, its potential experiences, its essential importance in the scheme of things, came quickly to Ruth Anne's intuitive perception and it was with a distinct sense of humility that she entered the doors of the training school. It seemed to her, so conscious was she of every new and full sensation, as though she were a postulant going to her novitiate with meek and reverent steps; standing in the dim hallway after the glare of the sun, the shelter of the big house became a benediction and a quite religious exaltation filled her. She was oblivious alike to the small dingy reception-room, its impossible pictures, shabby furniture, dog's-eared books and magazines, to the combined odors of boiling beef and boiling clothes, to the harsh sounds of scolding and to the curious and critical attitude of the matron who welcomed her none too warmly, and took her to her room through corridors where slatternly maids were scrubbing, where furniture was being moved about and baskets of linen clean and soiled beset their path.

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She but half heard and did not at all listen to the very perfunctory instructions of her cicerone about the location of fire-escapes, the dinner-hour, classes, and the seemingly comprehensive and exhaustive book of rules governing conduct in the home which she now offered her with an air of finality. The matron was poised for flight, her white skirts spread, the points of her stiff and wonderfully-laundered cap quivering with the impulse of departure. One question Ruth Anne brought out of the maze of her dreaming.

"Where can I see the superintendent?"

The matron sniffed and smiled with the corners of her fine and very firm little mouth:

"The superintendent sees probationers only when she sends for them." Seeing the emphasis of her reply was almost if not altogether lost on the probationer she added, "and that is only for purposes of discipline in cases of misconduct."

The white uniform and defiant cap vanished. Ruth Anne heard the sounds of voices for a moment in the hall, the soft fall of rubber heels on the stair and then it was still.

Discipline! Misconduct! Terrible words. They had never in her life had a personal meaning before. She stood in the middle of the strange room, a periscian room filled with darkness and a hostility which brought at once her high ecstasy down to earth.

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The one window admitted a pale light from a smoky court-yard, and looking down she saw scullery maids busy with vegetables, garbage cans standing about, she heard loud voices in guttural cries and coarse laughter; all around were the windows of the three wings, stringy curtains, milk bottles and jam pots on sills, a spindly fern reaching out dusty anæmic fronds to the light, a nurse drying her hair at an open casement, stockings and gloves pinned on to curtains to dry. All this was like a tenement house with its smells of washing and cooking.

The peracute perceptivity which had taken on so readily the grandeur of things the street suggested, now as quickly grasped the feel of the house with its physical slavery and sacrifices, its endless change and mystery, and reached out with a concrete tenacity into the gloom for the one good thing that must be there, for the dynamic good that must permeate it and keep it vital. Still looking out she lifted her eyes above the roofs and they fell upon the high sunlit walls of the hospital, her hospital. She reached out her arms toward it. There—there it was, just across the way,—that wall pierced with endless windows, behind them long rows of beds: that place of suffering was to turn all this into golden opportunity for gracious deeds, for self-sacrifice, for knowledge, for service. Thus in a quiet ecstasy

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she put on her ugly brown uniform, the badge of the despised probationer, and by sitting close to the window she could see to read the book of rules so highly recommended to her by the starched autocrat.

Presently two young women in brown burst into the room. Ruth Anne's student days had begun.

Ruth Anne's first day in the ward began at seven-thirty one morning a week later. The preceding days had been filled with clinics on every kind of bed and bath conceivable to the professional mind and she reported for duty to the blue nurse in the nurse room equipped to make beds and give baths in endless number and variety.

Between eight and twelve o'clock she washed seven beds; she subsequently learned that she should have done twenty. She went to first dinner with aching back and bruised fingers, hoping the afternoon would go better; she was to relieve at Children's.

A senior was in charge of the pneumonia floor and of course had medicines and treatments, and she, glorious privilege, had junior work, waiting and diets.

The blue nurse was busy admitting a patient from the receiving ward when Dr. Webster, the senior interne, came into observation in response

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to a call from the chief nurse. Ruth Anne was trying to keep twelve bottles in position for feeding at once, adjusting one after another as fretful and angry cries surged about her. The doctor was looking over the baby he had come to see; Ruth Anne stood near, the etiquette of the occasion not clear in her mind.

"Hand solution, please,"—the doctor was still regarding the boy thoughtfully while he held out his hands.

"I beg your pardon?" Ruth Anne turned red and stood irresolute.

"Hand solution, I said. Bichloride of mercury. A green solution. In a white basin. In the dressing room. On the table," his voice rose in soft crescendo as he spoke each phrase slowly and elaborately, gesturing up and down emphatically with the outstretched and contaminated hands.

"I'm sorry. This is my first day in this ward, I'm on relief——"

"Yes," interrupted the doctor washing his hands, "I understand. Your regular work is scrubbing beds." He was holding out his dripping hands now.

"Towel! Ye Gods!" Turning quickly to bring the towel Ruth Anne collided with the blue nurse coming in to hear the verdict on the baby. Miss Carson frowned at her spoiled apron and

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shook her head. The doctor laughed pleasantly. Ruth Anne kept back her tears.

"No reports on that culture yet? Well, we'll have to send him over. Emergency." The doctor signed the transfer. "Call up if you get a positive report; they'll all have to have a couple of thousand probably."

Miss Carson was at her desk filling the duplicate transfer. Ruth Anne went in again to the child who seemed so sick and would not touch his bottle. The doctor put his head inside the door, called her over to him with a nod, a trick of the chin—

"Never mind, little girl." He smiled, his white teeth showing pleasantly.

Ruth Anne's tear dropped on the child she was putting on to the cart, but she smiled as the orderly rolled him out. "What a nice man! But he didn't need to call me little girl," she pulled herself up, "and I'm as old as he is."

VI

SEPTEMBER brought John Hunt back from the North Woods, bronzed, lean, handsome, and confident. The campaign had been a hard one; he had spent the early summer gathering in the loose ends of his political affairs, and the middle of July found him with a coterie of congenial young lawyers and politicians at Devil's Gap Club. The life there, golfing, tramping, shooting in the cold north air, fitted him like a gladiator for the combat; there was victory in every nerve and sinew, a buoyancy of spirit caught from the woods and waters.

The summer had given him the easy companionship of a number of young women attracted to the cabin as much by Edith's undeniable charm and sweetness as by the presence of the male Hunts, all good-looking, agreeable, and interesting men; but they had been only a passive though quite acceptable part of the summer's amusement. He now missed them, strangely. Edith had stayed on for another month, to shiver in Jaegers he told her, and the house on the boulevard was an empty place these mellow cool fall evenings when the spirit of out-of-doors was still calling him.

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"What would you do to-night, Hannah?" he asked the surprised waitress who brought the decanter and glasses.

"Thank you, I'm sure I don't know, Mr. John. I think I'd go out in the automobile; it came home to-day and it looks beautiful, sir."

"Right-O, Hannah, you have saved my life; here, take this away. Don't you know I never drink when I drive the car?" He pushed aside the tray, rose abruptly, walked about hands in pockets, then went to the 'phone.

Ruth Anne was playing for dancing in the nurses' sitting room when Hunt's card was brought her. The dancers stopped and regarded her curiously; then someone else was found to play and the dancing went on.

It was with a thrill of pleasure that Ruth Anne shook hands; Hunt looked so genuinely glad to see her, with an almost effervescent boyishness in his laugh. The moment at once became awkward, as the small reception-room was already filled with the evening's visitors, and she looked about helplessly. "I don't want to seem inhospitable, but I fear I shall have to ask you to go for a walk——"

Hunt interrupted her quickly:

"Won't you come for a little run in my car? It's just a corking evening."

As she went upstairs for her wraps she won-

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dered what the nurses did with their men friends,—they must meet them on corners like the cook,—and thought how shameful it was.

They turned out of the narrow street into the open spaces of the boulevards. Driving a big car at night doesn't leave a man much freedom for conversation, and she was glad, this was her first outing since her illness of diphtheria. The exhilarating rushes of fresh air filled her with new life, a subtle expectancy took possession of her as they rushed on, and the silence became more full and dangerous than speech.

They swept around the bay, where there was a band concert, and out into the long reaches of the parkway. Hunt dropped the motor down to second and asked about her summer.

"Oh, it has been a good deal of a mess altogether; first there were the months of waiting for my appointment to the hospital to live through when I was filled with impatience to begin. I had gone into a boarding-house—well, it was insufferable, the gossip, the loud dressing, the gambling at bridge day and night, the pianos and the singing; I was in despair, not a moment ever to possess one's self in silence."

Hunt thought resentfully of the ease and comfort of his brother's empty house all summer with servants idle.

"Why didn't you go to the country? Why, you could have come up to the club with us.

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Edith had no idea you were alone like that, I am sure——” He stopped the car now where the moon lay all silvery on the water.

“ Oh, it was what I wanted, and at first it was interesting. Then I did go to the country, and that’s the story. Life is strange and wonderful, isn’t it? Years and years ago my mother had a dear intimate friend, sometimes they corresponded, hers were almost the only letters that she answered herself. I don’t think I ever saw her, but when she heard of my mother’s death she wrote me from her country home, saying if I would not mind the quiet and monotony and wanted a rest and companionship at any time I should come to her. Not the regular letter of condolence, and yet it was so full of sympathy, it had a tempting flavor of old times and old days. Her name is Barbara——”

“ Not Barbara Brewster! ”

“ Barbara Brewster. How did you know? ”

“ There’s only one Barbara who’s different from every one else and that’s Mrs. Brewster. Did you go? ”

“ Yes, but how do you know her? ”

“ How does any one know anybody? ” he retorted.

“ Nonsense. I insist on knowing. I won’t tell you another thing until you tell me. This is the most interesting thing——”

“ Since you insist, I can’t keep up any pretence

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of deep mystery. Edith knows her, they were chums at college, and she's a quite devoted friend of some other people I know; she's everybody's friend."

"So I found when I went out there. Isn't she a dear?"

"So it seems. The wonderful thing about her is that so many women care about her, really genuinely admire her, women of varied pursuits and lives. Do you understand it?"

"Yes," she mused, "in a way. What's so miraculous is the way she understands you, your innermost being, the thing that is you, the—the essence of everything, she grasps some way. She's universal like the sea, or the earth, the mother of us all." They sat silent for a moment.

Hunt laughed, "You are enthusiastic. It's her wonderful secret. Is she as handsome as ever? I haven't seen her in a long time."

"Beautiful, you mean?"

"Well, hardly. No I should only call her handsome and mysterious."

"Isn't she mysterious?"

"Oh, beyond everything. It's her frankness that makes her so; when a woman is so tremendously frank you wonder and continue to wonder what she's hiding."

"She's hiding herself down there. She never has guests, never sees anyone."

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"Don't you believe it. She's exhibiting herself full length for some one."

Ruth Anne gasped.

"How horrid!"

"Oh, all for his good, you may be sure."

"His good! I didn't see a man while I was there."

"A woman as clever as Barbara could keep him hidden."

"I think you are horrid about Barbara."

"Miss Barnard, you've a great deal to learn about Mrs. Brewster, as no doubt we all have."

They were coming back into the city boulevard and further talk was impossible except a fragment once and again.

The ride had been delightful, she told him at the steps; yes, she would go again any evening only he must call up, sometimes she had class.

He came often after this and they went for long drives, but they never talked again of Barbara Brewster. Ruth Anne recalled their conversation, and it smacked so of disloyalty that presently in writing to Barbara she said that she had mentioned her name to John Hunt in speaking of her kindness to herself and he had said that he knew her. Mrs. Brewster did not write for some time and then it was of other things. Nevertheless the conversation was classified as another curious and interesting thing to add to

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her collection of fact and fancies about Barbara.

Arthritis kept Ruth Anne off duty for two weeks longer and then she was posted for Children's. She found eight hours' duty strenuous work, for she had not gotten back her strength; there was a lack of resiliency in her body that puzzled her and her ankles were still troublesome. Her first morning at work she met the senior interne again:

Dr. Webster was strapping a pleurisy area when she came in to clean up the dressing-room.

"Hello, it's the little girl!"

"My name is Barnard, please."

"Thank you. Barnard, that's right, so it is. 'Barney,' the probies call you." He drew a strap taut—"Stand that, son? Yep? All right."

Ruth Anne snipped the adhesive and he went on—

"Yes, I asked what had become of you—missed your efficient assistance—and they said you'd gone over. Klebs Loefflerus?"

"Yes," said Ruth Anne moving about with a slight limp, "I suppose so, though they call it 'dip' over there."

"Arthritis, eh?"

Ruth Anne nodded.

"Antitoxin's the devil, isn't it? How many units did you get?"

"Only fifteen thousand."

"Um, hold his arm, please." He finished the

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strapping, cocking his head to admire an exceedingly artistic piece of work. "Take him away."

Ruth Anne tied the child's gown and awkwardly lifted him.

"Heavens and earth, give him to me." Dr. Webster took the boy out of her helpless arms and laid him in his bed with a skill and gentleness his mother would have envied.

"Thank you," she said demurely under the eye of the head nurse who came in at that moment. Ruth Anne came back and helped with other dressings, not badly at all, the doctor assured her under his breath when they had finished. The doctor's kindness and tenderness to the children and his sense of humor took her quite by storm—that such men as these should be giving of their best and all to these poor little ones. She went through the hard long hours, through the cries and moans of twenty children, some running about in noisy convalescence, some white and still in the little rooms, absorbed within herself,—not with their ills or her work, which she got through somehow on aching feet but with the rich consciousness of nearness to a charming and buoyant personality with smiling eyes and laughing voice. That was what her training would mean for three years; a succession of contacts, some agreeable, many disagreeable she did not doubt, with men; but all rich in

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experience of life and throbbing with its vital currents and flashing scintillations.

Other doctors she did meet and came to know in matter-of-fact friendliness and understanding as she learned her work and was given added responsibility, but no doctor did she reach out and claim for her own as she did Dr. Webster. She would make him tell her things about the hospital, about his work, about himself, about life, about all the mysterious elements that went to make up the complicated world within the hospital walls; he seemed eager for companionship and she gave him almost every hour she had free from duty and classes.

Sunday was a strange day in the hospital, not at all like the Sunday conceived of in any mere lay person's mind. One thinks of long rows of white beds, and quietness, the skilful touch of soft fingers, a gentle-voiced visitor, perhaps a priest coming and going, the slipping of beads in thin white fingers, a vase of flowers, the Sabbath light falling on patient faces purified of all passion by suffering.

In a ward having eighty beds there are on week-days five nurses, working to the limit of their capacity and strength the long hours of their duty, doing then only necessary things, none of the extras, little attentions, sympathies, comforting, changing of pillows, smoothing away of wrinkles, rubbing of aching backs, changing posi-

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tion of tired bodies,—none of the human things done for them. Impossible. There are the quick baths twice a week, the needful changes of linen daily, the hasty brushing of matted tangled hair, the treatments ordered on the records, the medicines and three diets a day. Heavens, what more is there time for!

On Sunday there are still eighty patients and they are as ill as on week-days. There are three nurses on duty for morning and two for afternoon. They try to do all of the required things; none are done well. Everywhere is haste, slovenly work, careless technique, impatience and neglect. Noisy orderlies push in carts with boiled beans and pork and apple sauce. Some of the patients have bowls of soup, many have nothing, this being a surgical ward. They are all fretful, tired, restless, impatiently waiting for two-o'clock visiting hour, every lonely neglected soul hoping that somebody will come and visit her.

One-thirty and the nurses change. Two come on to do the work in place of the inadequate three. There is a perfunctory and still hurried completing of toilets, straightening of beds and tables, giving of medicines and treatments to the desperately ill before the stream of visitors, like those waiting at a moving picture show, pour into and engulf every long corridor, private room and ward.

Ruth Anne's first Sunday afternoon in women's

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surgical remained all her life a hideous nightmare.

The ward was quickly filled with a crowd of gesticulating, crying, laughing friends and relatives talking all at once and in every civilized tongue. They kissed, they caressed, they sat upon beds, they opened bags and parcels and brought forth mussy cakes and pies and every sort of fruit.

A choir from some religious society sang hymns in the corridor while women went about distributing flowers and tracts to every patient; social missionaries talked to those who had no other visitors. From across the hall came the sounds of the afternoon service in the chapel, the exhortation and the prayer.

Ruth Anne felt helpless, following the lead of her head nurse, doing what futile things she could in the confusion. A laparotomy operated during the night was going into shock, the white screens were hastily set about the bed, the doctor 'phoned for, the regular procedure of treatment begun in this babel; there was an extra quarter of morphine to be given a wildly delirious patient and Ruth Anne had to give it, her first hypodermic, then a "hypo" of strychnia for another, a woman in coma and so on from one to another. While the senior nurse was busy with the doctor on the shock case Ruth Anne tried in vain to keep the visitors about the screens quiet, but ineffec-

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tually, for the orders from the warden's office were not to interfere with visitors. It was a public hospital; they had a right there those two hours.

When four o'clock came an hour was wasted cleaning up waste-paper, orange and banana peelings, scraps of sandwiches, all the débris of the picnic before the real work of the hour could begin. Then the diets, big trays of tea, toast, and sauce were to be passed.

The shock patient was breathing fast and shallow, the priest was behind the screen, his mellow voice sounding mystical consolation. Some of those in the near beds were praying, lips moving, deep-set and hollow eyes watching for the swift messenger who came soon, soon, amid the rattling of dishes, the rolling of carts, the hushed question from lip to lip.

Dr. Webster came down to the ward as Ruth Anne, trembling, touched and torn with agony as she had never been before, came dazedly to the elevator. He joined her, saw the pity and horror in her tense face and hands, in the droop of her head and shoulders. She did not see him; he touched her forearm lightly.

"Pretty bad day?"

Ruth Anne nodded.

"If I come over after a while will you go for a walk?"

Ruth Anne was still dumb; she nodded again.

VII

"THE glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" was as a mess of pottage compared to the splendor of Ruth Anne in her blue uniform, bibbed apron, and pointed cap the morning after her acceptance. She had passed her preliminaries, biology, "bac," chemistry, materia medica, and practical clinics, all in A; the grim superintendent's gloomy talk on loyalty, duty, and ethics failed to bring her down from an exalted pitch of enthusiasm, a sort of ethereal bath in which she had soaked and splashed about drunkenly for a day and a night.

She was no longer the despised, hectored, and trampled-upon proby giving precedence to everyone. She was a blue nurse, a person of authority; a very different being from the meek little thing in brown. She would have medicines, she would have treatments, she would have night duty. She could be out after ten o'clock and (unspeakable bliss) she could browbeat and trample upon and lord it over the new division of probationers.

Underneath these trappings of pomp and circumstance, back of the opportunities and privileges of which they were the visible symbol, there lay a perplexing consciousness of consecration

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which had come to her with the putting on of the uniform; it was like the feeling she recalled having had when she went to confirmation in wreath and veil, the bridal-like garments had a strange similarity in their significance to the trim starched and immaculate uniform of the City Hospital nurse. She had bound herself to work and obedience, submission to discipline, loyalty to the uniform for three years; she was to uphold the dignity and honor of the training school so far as in her power lay under all circumstances. She had signed the bond in which were contained some minor items as to vacations, payment for service, etc., which had meant nothing to her, that one clause was so overwhelming. Her vivid imagination was picturing a succession of thrilling accidents, emergencies during which the flash of the camera found her standing firm against fearful odds maintaining the honor of the uniform.

Her advent into the ward was an event, all the doctors she knew congratulated her; she went about in full regalia intensely serious, with fountain pen and pinball—for all the world like a young officer with shining new epaulettes and sword.

A month of medicines and then she was posted for night duty in Seven, with only an inconsequential young intermediate for her senior in the ward of seventy-five beds.

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The report from the nurse in charge at nine-thirty indicated the night would bring them plenty of work. Number Seven was to be tubbed at one hundred and one; Sixteen was due a cold pack at ten; Twenty-four (pneumonia, desperately ill, delirious, crisis due) to be watched carefully; Thirty-four and Forty-one, sponge every three hours, doctor to be called if change for the worse; Sixty-three to have one-eighth after twelve if not sleeping; ice-bags filled for heart cases; Seventy-one and Seventy-two strychnia every four hours, if breathing labored doctor to be called; Seventy-five (rheumatism, had serum, in heavy chill, watch pulse). Other patients medicines only—if any change call night superintendent.

Warden's special in private room to have hot dressings every two hours—one-eighth if unable to sleep.

Miss Baker, the intermediate in charge, took the desk, put the keys of the medicine chest into her pocket, read over the orders again, went to look at Twenty-four and began work. It was a bitter night, draughts were whistling through the ward, some windows were to be closed and others opened, extra blankets to be gotten out of the closet and put on the beds near the doors and open windows, and rounds to be made to tuck patients in. Then it was time to pack Sixteen. Routine work went on until twelve o'clock

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—dinner-time. Ruth Anne begged Miss Baker to go first; she knew she could eat nothing with the terror confronting her of twenty minutes alone in the big dark ward. She went about with her candle from bed to bed, looking at each patient to see that she was not dead—if only they would all live until Miss Baker came back! Sometimes she held her breath and leaned very near, shading the candle with her hand to hear the breathing at all; many times a head thrown back into the pillows and with mouth open sucking in the breath across dry cracked lips gave her an added terror. Seventy-five was still shaking, teeth chattering, eyes rolling in the agony of her chill. Someone would surely die before morning, Miss Baker said, there were so many beds marked Call. She seemed to herself wandering about with the candle flame, a sort of disembodied spirit keeping watch among the dead. She was glad when Twenty-four began talking and sat up, it gave her something to do persuading her to lie down and be quiet again; patients on both sides of her awoke, complained, and presently slept again. She walked about in a cold chattering terror, she wanted to scream and to run out of doors, anywhere away from these white shapes and changing terrors.

When Miss Baker came back from dinner she came at once to Twenty-four.

“I’ve got her on my mind somehow. I’m

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going to call Dr. Harper. She ought to have a 'hypo.' With all these hot dressings and sponges we can't watch her every minute. Go on to your dinner." Miss Baker went to the 'phone.

Ruth Anne hurried to the welcome warmth and life of the midnight dinner with its stimulating steak and coffee, then back through the fear-some empty corridors, past an orderly pushing a heavy cart, past Father Dorney taking long strides across the court-yard, and at the doorway fell in with the night superintendent making her second rounds.

Miss Adams was a splendid, strong woman, stern, serene, courageous. The hurrying terror-stricken nurse in blue knew now what the nurses meant when they said there was no sound so heavenly as her footsteps at two A.M. She came into the ward, speaking to Miss Baker in low tones not rising at a question but continuing in a monotonous hum scarcely distinguishable as she made rounds to all of the bad patients, told Miss Baker to hurry up Dr. Harper for Twenty-four—he was busy now with an emergency in Twelve—said she would be at T. B., if they wanted her, a patient had just died there.

Miss Baker went into the private room to put the hot dressings on the warden's special. Ruth Anne was giving strychnia to Seventy-two. Something made her look up as she held the



HER FINGERS LOOSENED SUDDENLY AND TWENTY-FOUR WAS GONE

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needle poised over the bared arm; there was a movement in the gloom, something white disappearing into the blackness at the end of the long ward. She dropped the "hypo" in her mad flight after the vanishing white figure, calling to Miss Baker as she ran. Perhaps—God of mercy, Twenty-four was empty!

She called hoarsely, breathlessly for help again and again, as she caught the delirious woman and struggled with her. Fighting her way to the window, pulling the nurse steadily inch by inch after her, Twenty-four deftly wrenched herself free, beating about her with clenched fists, gained the window-sill at a bound and threw up the sash. Ruth Anne had her again about the knees, adding her weight to the might of her arms, holding desperately to the swaying limbs. But she was going over, over, she could not hold her back, she heard footsteps behind—

"Coming, coming, hold her!"

God, she could not. The woman was struggling madly to free herself, dragging Ruth Anne's hands and wrists over the stone ledge, bruising and tearing them; her arms were straining at the shoulder, untrained muscles could bear no more, her wrists were giving way, her fingers slipping; they loosened suddenly and Twenty-four was gone. There was a crash to the fire-escape below, the sound of rolling and bumping

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from step to step, then she lay still on the next landing.

The others had gone to fetch her; Ruth Anne was alone, peering out into the bitter night, clasping her bleeding hands. Somehow she stemmed the rushing stream of emotion, stopping for a moment the whirling current of her terror and despair. There were things to do—people were depending on her to do things—what things?—to call the superintendent, to keep the patients quiet, that was it—some were out of bed, some were at the window, all was tumult. She staggered about speaking in hoarse whispers persuasion and command, tucked them into their beds, called Miss Adams from T. B., heard the elevator door open, heard them roll the cart into the dressing-room and close the door; then quite unprofessionally she fell against a bed and slipped to the floor.

What roused her was the feel of water on her face and the superintendent's voice:

"You're all right, Miss Barnard?"

"Yes,—I'm all right—thank you. Is she——"

"She is dead," said Miss Adams quietly, "I am sending Brown home with you. Go to bed at once. Don't talk about this to anybody. Not a word, Miss Barnard, do you understand? You will be able to tell me about it much better in the morning. Come down to the superintendent's office at eight."

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Miss Baker came into Ruth Anne's room early next morning; she was looking drawn and white and spent, with deep dark circles under her eyes. Ruth Anne was dressed in fresh uniform, sitting dumbly by the window, the blood beating like drums in her temples swaying her body with a rhythmic dizziness; her room-mate had gone to breakfast and she was alone. She rose, went up to her caller, touched her timidly on the arm:

"Good morning, I'm so sorry I had to be sent away and left you everything to do alone——"

"That's all right, Barney. Miss Adams stayed, she always helps us out. Did she ask you anything last night?"

"About how it happened? No."

"That's good. I didn't know—you never can tell about Miss Adams, how much she knows. They'll send for you right after chapel and put you on the rack."

"The sooner it comes the better: nothing can be worse than last night."

Miss Baker sat on the bed watching Ruth Anne.

"Barney, I've lied to them."

"About—last night?"

"Yes, I had to."

"What did you say?"

"That we were both in the ward when it happened."

RUTH ANNE

"That's very good of you, but I can't let you do it. I'll take all the blame. I ought to take all the blame."

"No, you shouldn't. It was my fault, I should not have left the ward to put the dressings on the warden's special. I should not have left Twenty-four until the doctor came and gave morphia, but I was in a hurry to get my work done and took a chance."

"So you told them—what?"

"That we were *both* in the ward; that you caught her first, and that we *both* tried to hold her; that she was pulling you out of the window, and that if you hadn't let go you would have gone over too,—that she was stronger than both of us. If you don't say that, Barney, I will be sent away; they will have to do it to save their faces."

"I don't understand these things at all," Ruth Anne shook her head vaguely.

"We have to stand by each other when these things happen; we all make mistakes, the faculty, the doctors, everyone: the less known about them the better. You will do it, won't you? You got to do it—they have to believe us both—I can't be sent away; I haven't a cent, I haven't a place in the world to go!"

Ruth Anne rose and held the door open.

"Go, please go; I want to think about it, I don't know what to do."

RUTH ANNE

It was a strange situation; if she lied she would have to leave the hospital, she owed that to her self-respect; if she told the truth Miss Baker would be dishonorably discharged and Miss Baker had no place to go. The appealing cry rang in her ears, it meant her ruin. Whom would the truth benefit if it were told? Her mind was not very clear, but she could think of no one.

She would be game, she would do it; she could see that she must. To save her own miserable conscience she could not send her sister to destruction. She had in some mysterious way suddenly become her keeper.

The interview with the faculty was short, almost comforting. She subscribed to the statement for the warden already signed by Miss Baker. They examined her arm and wrists, the skin broken and bruised, muscles strained, broad bands and splotches of purple on both arms to the shoulders, one arm she could not raise to her head. She was sent to the infirmary for dressings and ordered off duty.

In the evening Webster came over. He looked at her wrenched and twisted wrists in straps.

"These heroines!" he said in greeting.

She put her hands to her ears.

"Please don't talk about it! I've heard nothing else all day. They all just haunt my room and ask questions, I can't get away from it."

RUTH ANNE

"Got on your nerves, didn't it? Well, you'll get over that; it's like the first patient a doctor loses,—not in the hospital, those don't count,—but in private practice, they say it's the devil, takes a man's nerve."

Ruth Anne was troubled. If she was going away she must tell him why; he had been a good friend, he was entitled to know. Perhaps his point of view would help her. She began talking: she said she knew she could trust him, and told him the whole story. He did not interrupt, but listened splendidly; then there was the long pause while he turned it over.

"You did it alone! By Jove, that's stunning; it's a wonder she didn't pull you over—no wonder you let go."

"Oh, I didn't let go. That is, I didn't mean to. My fingers—they wouldn't hold when something snapped in my shoulder."

She was waiting for his verdict.

"You see it's very complicated; a general rule of conduct does not apply to emergencies. A young nurse can't be expected to meet them wisely, and warden's specials are ticklish patients, they come first always."

"If a statement of the facts had gone to the warden's office there would have been an awful mess; he would have said it was a subterfuge, a trick to shirk responsibility, a blow at his privi-

RUTH ANNE

lege to enter special patients and demand extra care for them. I doubt if you had told the faculty the truth whether *they* dared to report it themselves.

"The *entente cordiale* is such a delicate thing between the training school and the City Hospital that it would not stand any strain like making the warden's special the responsible factor in the death of a ward patient."

"Doesn't anyone dare tell the truth?"

"There isn't one of us dares tell the truth about anything. Institutions governed by politics are hell! Just that. Deception, duplicity, and untruthfulness are the heavy burden laid upon us who serve in public institutions. It is the price we pay for the almost invaluable experience we get here. It means so much to us, we all have to compromise." He looked into her serious and amazed eyes.

"However, in this case the trouble is a fundamental one, far, far back of, and beside, these futile sophistries. In this case it isn't the lie that counts. There are not enough nurses."

"Why can't there be enough nurses?" she demanded.

"If they had enough nurses there wouldn't be enough graft—that's simple."

Ruth Anne burst out with a sudden accession of heat—

RUTH ANNE

"It's a wrong, shameful, disgraceful thing that seventy-five desperately sick women should be given in charge of two inexperienced nurses in a dark ward at night; anything could happen——"

"And does," added Webster.

"Nothing is so shameful as that, that is the hideous fact which stands out stark, crying to us all. I will not remain in a hospital where these things exist. I cannot help them by staying here, perhaps I can if I go. I shall leave to-morrow. I came to learn to serve the poor and the unfortunate, to rejoice in the hardships of each rich experience; I shall have to learn some other way. I will not take a way that hardens my sympathies, makes me unresponsive to suffering, stifles every humanizing emotion, enmeshes me in deceit and falsehood, that makes me helper in the killing of innocent women and children. I can see that you men have to stay here and get your experience on these poor people. That is the service these people do an ungrateful society—they give their bodies into your hands for an open book."

"Ruth Anne, your enthusiasm carries you far; I hope it will not carry you so far that I shall be left quite behind."

"No," she smiled sadly, "but you must come along."

VIII

THE property on Bishop's Place which had attracted Ruth Anne's attention as producing an income disproportionate to its valuation was rented, so Johnson had told her, as a boarding and rooming house. She knew the street was old-fashioned and probably degenerate, that the boarding-house must be one of the variety characterized as cheap, and yet she did not see, since she must have a place to stay while looking about and deciding what she would do, why she should not go there as well as to another place; she thought it would be at least interesting to be in the old house again and she was mildly curious to see the kind of clerks and shop-girls who were boarding there, to whom her old house had become home; she hoped the landlady would have a room for her—if it was bad she would need to stay no longer than the time it would take to hear from Barbara, who would be glad, she was sure, to take her in.

As the cab drove up to the house in Bishop's Place the driver asked if the lady was sure it was the right number. The lady was sure it was, since she had seen it head her rent list for almost a year. The cabman shook his head sadly as she

RUTH ANNE

paid him; if she would excuse him—he had driven for the nurses' home a long time now, nurses, superintendents and board-ladies, but he had never brought anybody from there to a place like this; he hoped it was all right. Ruth Anne assured him it was (she thought he had been drinking) and looked about her.

Bishop's Place for all its grand name was a street one block in length, leading off from a busy thoroughfare crossing this tumble-down and disreputable part of the town. There were blocks of such streets on both sides of the car line, filled with little bakeries and sweet-shops, shoe-repair shops and lunch counters, filthy saloons and small factories alternating with shabby houses which had seen far, far better days. Anyone almost except Ruth Anne would have recognized it for what it was, a slum; her limited experience classified it as a poor quarter. It was from neighborhoods like this that the City Hospital drew its thousand patients. The paving broken and rough, the gutter filled with refuse was crossed and recrossed by women in bedraggled skirts wrapped about with capes and shawls, carrying pails and pitchers and sometimes a small package of food or a bare loaf of bread tucked conveniently under the arm.

Number Twenty occupied half of the square and extended from the corner to the alley, the

RUTH ANNE

house standing well back from both streets; the grounds were now a barren field of black filthy piles of snow and ice, old shoes and cans and ashes, all the rubbish of the unkept empty lot. There had been a sunken garden with flower-beds and hedges, a fountain on a terrace, and farther back elm trees and swings and sand piles. The iron fence was broken and sagging, the gate gone, the flags sunken, the steps were well enough, but the carved mahogany door was scratched and gouged as with the passing in and out of many trunks and the moving hastily of heavy furniture, part of its cluster of grapes and some leaves and one peach were quite gone. The shades were all drawn, there was no clean refreshing bit of muslin curtain to be seen; its front was depressing and forbidding, it seemed to scowl evilly at her.

"What an abandoned and reprobate place," said Ruth Anne, smiling and shaking her head quite as sadly as the cabman. But then all the buildings in the street seemed in the same ill plight and she wondered why, wondering too about the high rental it brought—that troubled her. Johnson shouldn't charge poor people so much.

After what seemed a long wait the door opened partly and a slovenly woman stood in the aperture scowling at her. She was like some vermin-

RUTH ANNE

infested thing living in the darkness, frowning and squinting at the light.

"I should like to inquire about room and board, please; you have a sign in the window."

A grimy hand held the door open wide enough for her to enter. She waited in the dark passage, growing gradually accustomed to the gloom.

The woman who came down the stairway lighted a gas jet as she passed the chandelier. Ruth Anne saw that she was both untidy and ungracious; she seemed keen and business-like, however.

"Mrs. Smith?" Ruth Anne questioned; she had suddenly remembered the name from the rent list.

The woman said yes, but still stood looking at her visitor curiously. She saw the pale face, with its tired transparent look, without rouge or powder, the great dark shadowed eyes, not pencilled. There was a sort of nervous timidity and uncertainty in her whole manner, she wasn't at all like her usual guests.

"I never take in people I don't know about; who sent you here?" Mrs. Smith demanded suspiciously.

Ruth Anne felt the woman was almost showing her the door. She didn't of course want her to know who she was. On a venture she said:

"Mr. Johnson of the Adams Building."

RUTH ANNE

"Oh, if Mr. Johnson sent you, it's all right of course," the woman answered immediately and almost graciously as she led the way to the second floor. She named a price for a room that sounded exorbitant and Ruth Anne said so. Mrs. Smith replied that rents were high for this business and Ruth Anne thinking of her twelve per cent. again remembered that they were.

Though if the young lady was short of money, Mr. Johnson would make it all right when he came, she was sure—he was a very generous gentleman, Mr. Johnson was. All of this while she silently took in the probable cost of her gown and furs. She could have meals or not, just as she liked; they were extra of course. Most of the ladies ate here, as the restaurants in the neighborhood were very poor.

Like all the house the room was dull and stuffy; it was the rear hall room on the second floor, and the only one vacant. She was lucky to get one at all, a well-run house was always full, the landlady said, but for a friend of Mr. Johnson's she would see what she could do, perhaps some of her ladies would be going soon, you never could tell.

Ruth Anne was too tired to resent the offensive familiarity of the woman's speech, but there was something unaccustomed in the atmosphere of the place, a certain richness of the shabby fur-

RUTH ANNE

nishing, the lack of out-door light and air perhaps, or the hard-lined face of the landlady; she could not define it, she charged it to nerves—she had been through a terrible time. She remembered villainous *pensions* on the continent where they had been made most comfortable and had excellent meals. It was already dusk of the early winter's day, she was tired and she did not wish to go any farther. So she paid the woman a week's rent and the slatternly servant brought up her bags.

"There's a bell. You ring if you want anything," she explained and waited.

"You may send me up some tea and toast after a while, if you please; I am very tired and shall not go down to dinner."

"What name if anybody calls?"

"Barnard; but nobody will call, thank you."

The landlady looked queerly at her, pulled a mussy chiffon shawl about her shoulders holding it with thin fingers much beringed and shut the door.

"The water wagon—tea and toast. Thank God that don't last long," she grumbled, returning to the regions of darkness.

But the tea and toast came up and they were excellent, to the new boarder's great surprise. She rearranged the furniture, folding and laying aside the fringed chenille cover on the marble-

RUTH ANNE

top table, lighted the gas and drew the shades to shut out the blackness and the storm. There was soon the stir of people moving about in the house, the sound of doors, and of voices. Ruth Anne thought of the poor tired girls coming home to this desolate place. After a while there was the sound of the piano and singing, the smell of dinner, someone cursing outside in the hall—it couldn't possibly be, but it sounded like a woman's voice.

Ruth Anne locked her door and went to bed. The house was very noisy but she remembered the evenings at the boarding-house, and quite worn out soon fell asleep, covering up her head like a child afraid of the dark.

Loud and repeated cries wakened her; she roused stupidly as from narcosis, clutching about her as the cries hammered insistently on her dull consciousness. She sat up and listened, each moment's accession of awareness adding to her bewilderment a deep alarm, a dread of some horrible unknown peril close to her proclaimed in those insistent cries of rage and fury which rose about her. Rigid, voiceless fear overwhelmed her, her heart-beat seemed to fill the room and surge back upon her, her breath stifled in her throat; she could not battle alone in the dark in this hideous place with the maddening terror creeping upon and possessing her, while

RUTH ANNE

cry after cry and curse and imprecation assailed her stricken ears.

As it went on Ruth Anne began, at first vaguely and then more clearly, and then with quite terrible precision, to single out and fix in her thought what really was going on, each concrete thing outside her closed door.

They were beside and above and below her, those sounds. There were men's and women's voices, drunken voices, raised to screaming pitch in anger and dispute, there were bells ringing, doors slamming, hurried feet going to and fro; down below there was laughter, shrill and blood-curdling in its quality of bestial drunkenness, the fall and clash and clatter of bottles and glasses, voices in hoarse whispers on the landing and then bedlam in full cry again.

From moment to moment Ruth Anne sat rigid, stiffly leaning forward. The gas flared up suddenly in the hall and a bright light streamed through her transom; she could see objects in the room dimly; she wished she could find courage to move but she could not, there was nothing within her but fear and ice; she sat quaking and shivering. There was a hoarse wrathful torrent of foul words and then a pistol shot did for her what she could not force her recreant courage to accomplish; it brought her up standing on the floor gasping for breath. Then the splintering of

RUTH ANNE

furniture, a volley of curses, a beating on the door next hers, the giving way of the lock after heavy blows upon it—the stream of curses growing fainter, interrupted by groans—the tearing of muslin, a voice almost sober calling for alcohol, another for whiskey—hurried discussion of methods of bandaging, the clinking of glasses, maudlin women's voices crying 'Oh my God!' Then the heavy steps of men carrying a burden down the stairs, the shuffle of feet on the landing, the creak of the frozen snow, the thumping of the engine of a motor and the harsh grip of the chains plowing through the snow.

People were moving about now in sober haste, there were bright lights everywhere, people running down the stairs and into the street; it seemed everyone in the house was going out.

Ruth Anne began dressing, moving softly on tiptoes, putting her things into her bag. She looked at her watch, it was two o'clock; it would not be light enough to go until six. Her vigil must last four hours longer; the police would surely come before that time and all would be confusion again. She sat dumbly upright in a straight chair, she did not dare open the door; the terror within was devouring her but death or worse might be waiting to seize her outside. She wished she might die quickly and decently and not of this slow torture, but she had no cour-

RUTH ANNE

age to face the uncertain thing that might await her outside that dividing wall.

The stillness become profound and fearful to her desperate consciousness was suddenly broken by loud and repeated ringing of the bell. There were men's voices in the vestibule; she caught her own name, new terror besieged her,—nameless things of vileness, a more horrible thing was to happen to her. Her peril was stalking on, bounding up the steps two at a time in a rush to reach her.

"Gentleman to see you, Miss Barnard."

Ruth Anne did not breathe nor speak, she crept toward the window, there was the way down there, into the blessed snow—it had been all over with Twenty-four in a minute.

There was a loud imperative knock now, a man's knock; she swayed back against the wall.

"Barney."

"Yes, yes, I'm here."

Her numb fingers fumbled with the key, the door opened at last.

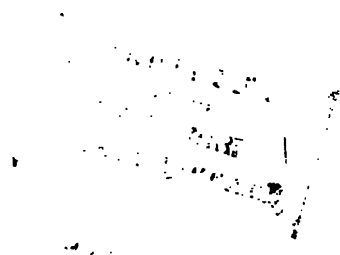
"I have come for you."

Dr. Webster was standing there, the old cabby behind him, heavy driving-whip in hand.

Ruth Anne turned back, like one in a dream who does the petty foolish things in times of catastrophe, she lighted the gas, adjusted her hat and pinned it on, sought her gloves in the bureau



"WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?"



RUTH ANNE

drawer, put on her coat, handed the doctor her travelling bag and went downstairs, her hand resting on his arm.

The night was bitter, the snow blowing about, he packed her into the cab with rugs, and climbed in beside her.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To the Grand Central Station. How did you know where to find me? Who told you?" She brought the words out in sharp monotone.

"Old John."

She leaned back with a sigh. The cab was creaking through drifts of snow, pulling with blissful deliberateness; it was still and white everywhere, the mysterious early morning quietness of winter.

Oh, it was all a different world from the one of an hour ago, a blessed illimitable world of freedom, of miraculous adventure, of knightly deeds, a vast place of chivalry and devotion.

It was three when they reached the station; there was no train to Parkwood, Mrs. Brewster's country home, until seven. She could sit in the big waiting-room and be quite comfortable, she had a book in her bag. She would be quite comfortable, she thanked Dr. Webster, he need not stay—she held out her hand.

He took her hand but said he would not go. Later on there would be hot coffee at the lunch

RUTH ANNE

counter and he would put her on the train; she was in no state to be left alone to-night.

She assured him she was quite all right.

He looked at her and shook his head:

"No, you are ill. It isn't just a state of mind, it's pathological,—you need a doctor."

She laughed, perhaps she did.

Dr. Webster sat down beside her, his hat shading his eyes, overcoat wrapped about his knees. She noticed he was in his ducks and wondered if he was cold. She sat up as long as she could; she was faint with fatigue, if only she could sleep for a moment,—she put her hand on his arm, a final intensity of feeling seeking expression.

"May I——" she faltered weakly, for it was such an unusual thing to ask a man.

"Yes?"

"—May I put my head on your shoulder?"

IX

MRS. BREWSTER had been in town shopping. She thought it a shame too, to waste such a splendid day in offices and stores when it was perfect for tramping through woods and lanes and narrow shovelled paths and wild dreamland to the icy lake. By hedges and white driven fields she came to the beautiful embanked paths of her own place, brushing the feathery tips of overhanging shrubs. She turned about at the steps and viewed the sweep of field and woodland all in white; she sighed,—it would be there to-morrow, only not so fresh and immaculate. Blessed solitude, how she loved it; she wondered if she ever would venture back into the world again; she thought not, why indeed should she?

Her servant came into the hall as she stood looking over the day's mail.

"Miss Barnard is here, M'm, in your room, the blue room wasn't ready. She came right after you left, on the first train out this morning; she wanted to go right to bed——"

"To bed—why?" Barbara was throwing down her furs and packages.

"I think she's ill, M'm, she'd only a bit of soup for her lunch."

RUTH ANNE

Barbara's first thought was, "How good of her to come to me, how good of her to come to me. That terrible hospital, I knew it would be the death of her!" She ran upstairs and into the room; a sharp voice full of pain called to her.

"Barbara, Barbara, if you speak to me I shall cry!" which she proceeded to do tumultuously.

Barbara laughed—

"But you are crying anyway, you poor baby. My, but it's nice to have you here in my own bed with my own best nightie on."

"I hadn't any," she moaned.

Barbara laughed again, a pleased sort of bubble—

"You darling, did you run away?"

"How did you know?" sobbing.

"People travelling without luggage, who knows what they've done!"

"Barbara, I've done terrible things."

Mrs. Brewster came and kissed her, leaning over her tenderly:

"I'm sure you have; I never knew anything so heaven-sent as your advent in trouble: and to come right to me, to me to help you—I can't thank you enough, dear Ruth Anne. You know, child, I couldn't live if it weren't for other people's troubles; I batten on them."

Her guest's face was wet with tears again. Barbara made up the fire.

RUTH ANNE

"Why didn't you have a fire?"

"I wouldn't let her—I just wanted to be alone."

"Just so, I'm leaving."

"No, no! Don't go. You're the peace of all the earth, you're like the mother of us all, you're everything one needs."

Barbara was thinking as she knelt feeding the fire—she must not let her talk about her trouble to-night, whatever it was, she was in too emotional a mood—if there was trouble and she was to be told, she wanted facts; the emotions were only trimmings.

"I think you are too tired to talk now, dear. I'll bring in some supper and some magazines and then I'll leave you to go to sleep. I've work to do, and I shall be here in the study if you want me, or in the blue room. You must be alone until you are yourself. Perhaps you will want to tell me in the morning, and if you don't want to talk about it at all, which you may not to-morrow, then you see it will be all right."

"But I came for your help, Barbara."

"And you shall have it, dear, all there is, only to-morrow,"—with that she went out and Ruth Anne sobbed again in her pillows.

In the study Mrs. Brewster lighted another fire and rang for her maid.

"You may take off my boots (yes, and my

RUTH ANNE

hat)—bring me that gray gown please— No, the old one, the warm one. Miss Barnard will have a tray; I will have my dinner up here. Thank you, that's all."

She lounged comfortably before the fire toasting her toes, a very handsome woman of forty, of almost unusual height and remarkably proportioned figure. Her head was somewhat larger than is considered beautiful, with brown hair parted and combed loosely down at forehead and temples, in heavy braids at the back. Her face was oval yet full and soft with large brown eyes of golden tones of coloring, all shadowy and wrinkly underneath, a complexion of healthy creamy whiteness, a firm mouth, lips quite red, and wonderful teeth. Her ears were small; her neck was exquisite, she almost never wore it covered except with an endless succession of strings of pearls, semi-precious stones or curious chains of hand-wrought links of heavy gold.

Besides the unusual physical charm of person which disposed itself so luxuriously before the fire wondering about Ruth Anne's troubles, there was the half concealed splendor of a radiant life, a sort of Karma, the beauty of personality, the beauty of the real Barbara—which was after all the thing that attracted everyone, those who knew her and those to whom she was strange. Everyone admired her, trusted her, loved her.

RUTH ANNE

It was her universality, her completeness; she was, as Ruth Anne had inspiringly said and as others had felt but had been unable to put so poetically, she was like the earth, our mother. There were all things in her: firmness and softness, wisdom and folly, experience and innocence, sorrow and joy, pain and ineffable happiness. There were love and abounding hope, maternal tenderness and fulness. It was all in her face and each one found there the thing he sought.

Barbara Brewster had a most arbitrary and unusual taste in matters of dress; her street clothes were conventional, unimaginative, just in the mode; but the gowns she lived in, in her home and her friend's houses and for evenings and occasions, were the admiration and despair of the most critically artistic taste. They were half-tones and heavy shaded silks, soft velvets and brocades, they always left neck and shoulders bare and trailed on the floor about her feet in great lengths and folds, they were of incomparable richness and simplicity with some rare lace or embroidery. She often wore one big jewel of some sort besides the inevitable chain or beads. She might have been the model in her various mediæval-looking gowns for Abbey's Grail pictures, she was so like them in stature and spirit.

How splendid to get one's suffering so young, she was thinking—twenty-six, she hadn't begun

RUTH ANNE

to live then— It must be something tremendous to take hold of the child like that——

The 'phone at her desk rang.

"Long distance: Dr. Webster? Miss Barnard? He can't speak to Miss Barnard. He may speak to Mrs. Brewster if he wishes. Yes—she is here—I don't think she is ill. She is very tired: I will tell her you have called up—Yes, in the morning—You'd better wait a day or two. Sunday? Thank you—good-by." Barbara hung up the receiver, her face glowing.

"So there is a man in it. Of course there was bound to be!"

Ruth Anne slept and waked and slept again, still restless. Terrible sounds waked her and she started up, to hear the ticking of the clock on the mantel or the rattle of a shutter in the high night wind; her door was open and Barbara was there, just there within call—it was all nonsense—she would sleep. But as the hours went on after midnight she could not; terrible sounds and scenes obsessed her. She began to tremble, her whole body shook, her hands and feet, she tried to hold her teeth together but could not; they would chatter, her hands would shake though she held them tight clasped together under the cover, the flesh on her limbs began crawling up and down; she tried to hold it still with her hands but could not, it was crawling everywhere at once.

RUTH ANNE

"Barbara," she called desperately, "Barbara! I'm dying of cold; come quickly—I'm in a chill—no, not really cold, a nervous chill—you must stop it—there's something I've forgotten, what to take— Barbara! Hurry as fast as you can."

"I know,"—Barbara returned with a glass; "Drink it all."

"Yes, that's it! I know by the smell. I didn't know they were so terrible— I've watched them, they had them just the same at the hospital after the serum—and we did nothing while they begged us in that agony. It's too terrible," she chattered.

Barbara was building up the fire, filling water-bottles, heating blankets and packing them about her. When the shaking had stopped she said:

"Now I'm going to sit here until morning; you go to sleep and don't you dare to see another one."

"Of what?"

"Of those terrible things you're seeing, I know."

And so the night brightened into dawn and Ruth Anne slept and Barbara crept to bed.

Ruth Anne was sitting up in the sunny room, warm and cozy and rested, almost herself again; a little weak with a helpless appealing look in her fine eyes and very much enjoying her ten o'clock breakfast. Mrs. Brewster sat at a table immersed in papers.

RUTH ANNE

"What are you doing? They look like examination papers."

"They are. I've a friend in the English department of the university, a little woman with a family; we were at college together. These are her themes, but mercy, she hasn't time to read them, so I who lead this idle, luxurious life do it for her. It's lots of fun; if I didn't, you see, she'd have to give up her chair, and she needs the money. I've a lazy sort of brain and this keeps its activity up to par."

"You are an angel."

"I'm not. I'm a selfish human. She adores me for doing it and I love to be adored, that's all."

Barbara put away the papers definitely and turned about:

"Now Ruth Anne, who is this doctor person calling up and demanding to know all about you as if he owned you?"

"When?"

"Last night."

"Dr. Webster—what did you tell him?"

"That you would be fine by Sunday; he's coming to see you."

Ruth Anne mused poutingly—

"Sunday, that's three days; yes, I'll be able to refuse him by that time."

"Ruth Anne Barnard!"

RUTH ANNE

"Yes, you see I expect him to propose the next time he sees me. It's quite on the cards." She played with the ribbons on her gown.

"What a shameless creature you've gotten to be at that hospital."

"Quite. They always propose in a novel after they rescue you, don't they? It's the heart convention, I believe."

"Is it sudden, or did anything lead up to it?"

"Both. Oh, things have been leading up to it, straight up to it for a long time, but just all at once we've had some unusual experiences and discussions and emotions together."

"I'm ashamed of you. A proper young woman has neither experiences nor emotions with men. Go on."

"Well we've had intense dramatic ones, life and death ones, purgatory and paradise ones—aren't they wonderful?"

Barbara stared at her, at what her face told her.

"They are," said Barbara with conviction.

"And so," continued Ruth Anne on the defensive, "any gentleman would think he just had to propose, and he is a gentleman, though he's shabby and small and poor and works in a charity hospital and teaches bacteriology and chemistry to the nurses. He's loyal and royal and fine and tender——"

RUTH ANNE

"That will do," interrupted Barbara, "till I see him. Tell me the story, you seem to be equal to it now."

She told it, it took a long time; Ruth Anne was in a mood to see its beautiful completeness as a story.

"And that was all, nothing more when you put your head on his shoulder?"

Ruth Anne nodded.

"He is a gentleman, God bless him!" said Barbara.

Sunday afternoon Mrs. Brewster was dressing for a tramp, high boots, short skirt, thick furs, close warm beaver hat; she announced she was going to walk over to the lake with her neighbor.

"I didn't know there was a neighbor."

"Yes, they have the Cuthbert house across the road."

"Who are 'they,' if I may ask?"

"Tom Lawrence—the Lawrences, you know,—and his mother-in-law."

"What a strange family. Is it with mother-in-law you go tramping?"

"My dear, sarcasm does not become you. Poor devil, mother-in-law lives with him to keep him, to keep a hold on the money, to keep up the conventions."

"For what?"

"For his wife, of course, who's motoring in a from Coast to Coast campaign for woman's

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suffrage. She's *the* Helena Lawrence, the most militant suffragette in America; she was in England all last year studying their methods, smashing windows, firing theatres, being dragged about by policeman—and a beauty too she is, her portrait was in the Salon two years ago. This is her second year of field work. And this fine man and her mother hang together, hoping she'll get sick of it all and come to her senses— No, she won't, she loves the spot-light, she has what you would call the bacillus of publicity. They came out here to live quietly, away from people; explaining and apologizing and making excuses was too much for the poor old thing, she hadn't enough inventiveness to keep it up."

Barbara laughed quietly and went on—

"Everyone here is like that, there's something queer about them all. Down the road are the Bradleys—private bank, depositors blew their brains out,—and their nearest neighbors are the Woods: Mr. Wood committed suicide so his family could have his life-insurance; and then there's the novelist, Mrs. Wyman, who's a morphine fiend and under some sort of restraint, and myself—I'm here to forget."

"A man?"

"Oh nothing worse I assure you."

"Does he help you to forget—Mr. Lawrence?"

"We somehow hit it off in our misery,"

RUTH ANNE

laughed Barbara, "sometimes we're quite happy even. Don't be afraid for me, he's quite safe; he has his own forgetting to do. We both love to be out in the woods and the snow; it would be stupid, now wouldn't it, if we both tramped off alone? I do wonder though sometimes if he ever will get over it. No, he never speaks of her except when some stupid person asks, thinking it's the tactful thing to do, then he says quite cheerfully and unconsequentially, she's very well, thank you, and having a corking time in California or New York or wherever it happens to be. For the soul of chivalry commend me to that man; and his sense of humor—there's his ring now, be sure you keep your little doctor for tea."

Ruth Anne went to the window. He seemed a very handsome man, quite gray, with top boots and ulster; she had never seen a handsomer man—but one. So there *was* a man after all, as John Hunt had said. She wondered how much Barbara saw of Hunt and what their common interests were.

It seemed almost bizarre to receive Dr. Webster in the large gracious living-room with its big fire, its splendid pictures and shelves of books; bleak halls and corridors and nurse-rooms and dressing-rooms and elevators and street corners and stone steps had been the ground of their foregathering, around them the rush and throb

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of life and the undignified hurry of the pauper's death.

To Webster, the quite impressive room, generous and restful, its warmth and glow of color, the sunset light on broad fields of snow lying all about its windows, accomplished a strange abatement of his purpose and desire; it was into another world, evidently her own world, that he had followed her. He felt presumptuous now to say what he had come to say; he had thought it easy, with the tired frightened helpless little nurse, but with this calm-eyed young woman in fashionable mourning he felt strange and ill at ease. He had felt himself her equal, had felt his love worthy of offering to her, and now he was in doubt, it seemed such a little thing.

Ruth Anne was graciousness itself, she made him wonderfully welcome; he had been so good, she could never be sufficiently grateful. He must tell her all about it, how he had come to look for her.

She told him why she had gone to Bishop's Place and what she had found there and the night's experience with skilful detachment of the personal element in dealing with an indelicate subject. There was the exact absence of the consciousness of sex that obtains at a clinic of internes and nurses, than which to the laity there can be no more complicated situation.

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She saw he was not at this time able to see the affair as a problem of consequence with which it was at once her duty to deal; he was absorbed with the adventure from the standpoint of his own interest, her danger, her suffering, his own agony over it until he found her safe. He could not at all put aside the high circumstance of his quest.

There was a long silence; the air was pregnant with feeling, it was vibrating all about her with myriad mystical influences. She sat in a low chair, her face turned away from the fire into the shadow; she could not let him have it full, so expectant, inviting, waiting. Webster was standing before her, and she lifted her eyes when he spoke—

“Miss Barnard . . . Barney—I love you, Barney.”

He took her hands; drawing her up to her feet, standing. She looked at him breathless, still, then dropped her eyes; she dared not let him see what was in them; she had waited all her life, on mountain paths, in mid-ocean on clear wind-swept decks, in garden-spots of the earth, in dim cathedrals for those words, “I love you!” She had thought never to hear them; and now she felt the triumph of her womanhood,—the woman sought, desired, a man demanding her. It thrilled through her:

RUTH ANNE

"Strange, isn't it—being loved?" she murmured.

In her eagerness for the fulness of this epochal experience she brought her face forward nearer to his, her chin lifted, braving his eyes.

"You are wonderful, Barney. Dear Barney, I love you," he cried, "I've no business telling you now—I don't know how to go any further . . . I can't say any more—I can't ask you to marry me—I can't even ask you to wait for me!"

"Why can't you?" she demanded quickly, pulling away her hands, clasping them behind her, drawing a little away from him.

"I'm a beggar—I haven't a penny—I've debts for college—borrowed money to pay back: we couldn't be married for years. It's a shameful thing to ask a woman to wait; waiting is so terrible, so wrong."

"How do you know? Have you ever waited for a woman?" she asked slowly.

"No, no. But I know the long years of poverty, lean hungry years, fighting. I can't ask you to face them. You're not made for it. You're too fine, too wonderful; I wish I could make you understand."

She groped about mystified, such reserve in love-making she could not comprehend; she wanted to be swept away.

RUTH ANNE

"Yes, yes; won't you please go on just as though you were not poor, forget about the money. I have money enough, not much, but enough, so that doesn't matter. Tell me all about your love and what it means and what you want." She spoke eagerly.

"I—I can't tell you. I just love you. It began the first day I saw you; you were different from anyone else I'd ever seen—the woman you love always is—

"I thought of you all the time, when you passed me and didn't speak or lift your eyes so that I could hail you it hurt; something was gone out of the day. You are always near me now: I am never alone—there are always two of us—everything I think of is of you and me together; I can't think of myself without you—you—you're a part of me. I want you, want you to marry me." He took her hands again, bending over her, pressing his lips to them, to her wrists—to the soft satin skin at the bend of her arm. She felt his lips coming nearer her in tremulous pressures. She did not want to stop him, she wanted to give more so that he would come closer.

"You are the first man who has ever told me he loved me, the first man who has ever kissed me, it is wonderful. Is there anything as wonderful as being loved?"

He was holding her in his arms now, just as she wished, close to his body.

RUTH ANNE

"Nothing in the world, except loving. Say you love me— You do love me?"

"I don't know, I'm thinking about it. I don't know anything about it yet."

But she was learning, volumes, with every second of their close embrace; a subtle understanding came from the touch of his body, a thrill that crept through and through her which she hugged to her heart; it was like the little waves of feeling when she had touched him in the wards or when walking, but raised to the *n*th power, if that be the highest potency of currents of emotion. She could not bear it any longer, it was too tense; she slipped from him and turned toward the fire, looking down all a tremble. She replaced a fallen log with her foot. She must ask him, now, before they were swept away entirely, the question she had always in the back of her head since she had known that her life was to touch his, that she was to have this intimate experience with him.

"I want to know about—you and other women. . . . Have there ever been other women?"

"It makes it easier for me to tell you since you ask; it's a difficult thing to talk about to the woman you love, but——" his voice was hoarse and heavy with an uneven quality of inflection, the sentences came short and slow, there was no

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disguise of motive or quibbling with terms:

"I have never seduced a good woman. I have never wronged an innocent girl. I have never made love to any woman but you.

"I have accepted gifts from women, I have asked for their favors; they were women of the world, their doors were open. There were not many of them; none of them have any ties or claims upon me. I am free." He buried his face in his hands.

"I am ashamed. I have only lived within what the world accepts as a man's code of morals; it is a shameful code, every man comes to know it some day in his soul when he faces the woman he loves.

"It was not altogether either weakness or wickedness in me; it was a desire to know, to feel, to experience the vital things in life, life itself, the elemental things, to probe the depths of myself, of my quiescent sex, to awaken the agony and the rapture of the man. And then it was over, there were no more new things to feel or to do until I began to love you."

"Stop, stop! Don't talk about that any more now, some other time. I want to think about this—this exploration of yours, into life. Did you think at the time it was sin?"

He turned upon her:

"No, it wasn't sin, it was pleasure. The puri-

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tan days are past, the days of darkness when the essential element of all pleasure was sin; we are more enlightened. Life was given to us to know——”

“So pleasure in the days of our enlightenment is the name for sin?”

“Why is it sin? Who can tell us? Who knows?” he cried.

“Oh, I don’t know. I don’t know, but I had hoped. I had just hoped there never had been anybody else. I had no reason to—no woman has, but I thought it might be so.”

She stopped, spent:

“You are my knight; you rescued me, you have been good to me, and courteous always; but you wouldn’t want me to give myself to you because of that. I don’t love you—I have never loved anybody, but Mother and Barbara, I have never known what it means: will you wait, wait till I see—there’s no hurry. Why should one hurry over the best thing in life? It’s like heaven just to touch it, to know that it’s in the world for you.” She was speaking in far-away detached tones—

“Oh, I can’t tell you. Let us just leave it alone and wait. Yes, you can go on loving me.” She stretched out her arms to him—

“I love it.”

X

"THERE," said Barbara, taking the letter to Johnson out of the typewriter and laying aside the carbon copy, "you sign that, and I am sure the house will be in readiness for your inspection on Friday morning."

"You are a wonder with your typewriter and your head for business,"—laying down the letter and taking up her fountain pen.

"Shall you take your properties out of his management?"

"Oh, yes, at once."

"I wish you'd try Stoughton—he's John Hunt's partner, you know—nice young man." Barbara gathered up her letters and sent them out.

"There are of course hundreds of cases like this: disreputable houses, unsafe tenements, unsanitary old fire-traps, and women use the income for gowns and furs and jewels which is paid them by their sisters' prostitution. There are many things a woman can do while she's waiting for the ballot and for her seat in legislatures; one of them is for every wife to see to it that her husband's women employees are paid a wage sufficient to enable them to live clean respectable

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lives. It is her duty to see that her money is clean, and she can if she will take the trouble; it takes time and is less picturesque than making speeches, addressing clubs and all that. If women would only take up the elemental things, the first things that need doing so desperately! There's your blessed City Hospital, why don't they do something there? What is the Auxiliary Board for, with Edith Hunt on it, I'd like to know—Everybody's afraid of politics or some other interest that will be injured. Individual effort, individual conscience, individual responsibility, you never hear of it." Barbara was walking about in a fine rage.

"What shall you do with the house, after all? John will tell you, which probably is true, that no respectable people will live there; it's in the worst part of the K street slum; you might do it over into a factory or work-shop or something of that sort, and clean up the grounds for a neighborhood playground; there must be hundreds of children in the streets all about there."

"I'm thinking of going there to live if I find I have money enough. Will you come with me?"

Mrs. Brewster did not answer at once, she was thinking rapidly. What had the child in her little head? Something serious, from the look in her eyes with which she waited her answer. Leave the House in the Woods? Impossible.

RUTH ANNE

There were things to keep her there. She would not say no until she knew what *was* in that little head, she must temporize.

“If you go there to live, I’ll have to, dear.”

“I thought you would—I have but the vaguest plan.” She began talking of what she wished to do. They sat together figuring incomes and expenses until very late.

During one of their many trips to town on the business of Bishop’s House, as they came to call it, Ruth Anne went to see Dr. Hollander. She had put it off to the last possible minute; she dreaded to tell him of her failure in the work he had advised for her, but she wanted his further advice about Bishop’s House and she must face him. He would think her vacillating, weak, and foolish no doubt; he might even tell her so if he thought it would be good for her,—but she cared more for his opinion than for anyone’s else; she must live up to his exactions since she had set out to do it. She was conscious now that it was quite as much to set herself in a lofty place in his mind that she was doing what she considered a courageous thing, a big thing, as it was her desire to right in some vicarious way the wrongs the house had done to society by falling into dissolution and ill-fame.

Her engagement was for four and she was not kept waiting. The haughty marcelled lady took

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in some letters, and coming out held the door open for her. Dr. Hollander was signing papers, seated at his desk with his broad back to her. She stood a little moment regarding him before he turned and rose.

"Miss Barnard,"—he held out his hand, looking directly past her; she merely touched it, it was quite formal and unwelcome in its stiffness.

"To what do I owe this unexpected and undeserved pleasure? You're looking radiantly well."

"Oh, thank you, I am well, I said I didn't want to see you professionally."

"So she said"—dryly.

"Why, was it wrong?"

"It is so unusual for me to see anyone other than professionally it would naturally attract some kind of comment."

"She's a very keen young lady outside, isn't she?"

"She has to be," he laughed.

"But you didn't have to see me if you didn't want; I know your time is valuable, perhaps I shouldn't trouble you——" she veiled her disappointment under an apologetic tone as she rose,—"only I wanted——"

"But, my dear Miss Barnard, sit down," and without asking he lighted a cigarette. After he

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had thrown back his head, pushed out his lower lip and sent one volume of smoke curling about his head:

"I want to see you. I wanted too——" he drew at his cigarette again,—“to hear how you are getting on with the nursing; I have often wondered. It's almost a year since you came to me. You must," he laughed, "know a great deal about nursing by this time."

He was speaking in a low tone rich and flowing; there was almost an Irish quality of softness in the depths of his voice. He threw aside his cigarette and looked at her directly for the first time since she had come in.

She straightened up; she felt behind his tone of banter that he was really calling her to account.

Ruth Anne told her story of the City Hospital, she thought she was telling it well; she gave somewhat freer rein to feeling than she had in talking to Barbara. She made a more insistent demand for sympathy, speaking unconsciously in hoarse tones broken by tremulous appealing half-whispered phases; she struck the note, the quite imperative note, of demanding admiration for her high stand in leaving the hospital, for her unwillingness to compromise with truth, for her refusal to work under existing conditions; she enlarged on these conditions; she made an appeal

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for the patients, for the nurses, that she felt he must respond to. As she talked on and on and he was silent, Ruth Anne felt that she had at last made an impression on him; that he was overwhelmed by her experiences, by her acumen in so immediately discovering conditions and making telling revelations of them. She was touched by her own warmth and eloquence.

She was ready, waiting in vibrating expectancy for the touch of his hand, the reassurance of his voice; but he was scowling furiously into blank space, his heavy black brows drawn together, his eyes narrowed, heavy lines fallen about his mouth.

He began speaking with measured and restrained deliberateness which gradually, as he proceeded to unfold his point of view, gave place to a vituperative and accusing tone of the deepest feeling.

"Miss Barnard,"—he looked at her directly now and she dropped her eyes; there was something terrifying in his face,—“you have wasted a splendid opportunity, you don't see it, of course; it is quite evident that you are totally blind to the fact that you have thrown away the best opportunity that will ever in your life come to you.

“I advised you to go to the City Hospital because I knew that opportunity was there. I sent

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you there to awaken your soul to its responsibilities, to the world's need, to the priceless value of unselfish service, the value beyond computing, both ethical and economic, of a life given over wholly to the study and working out of our overwhelming problems of to-day; that was to be your preliminary work for matriculation, to prove your fitness for entering upon what I told you before was an exalted mission.

"You had a chance for three years to study a problem at closest range, to have its different phases presented to your individual intelligence, phases that are puzzling us all: to live with it, to suffer with it, to struggle with it, to come somewhere near a comprehension of it—we none of us understand it, it's a dense blackness to us.

"You took with you unusual intelligence, an open and sympathetic mind, the grace of your culture, what I took to be an illuminating desire. I thought you good material, I could see you coming out of the crucible—for it is a crucible—pure gold.

"You have failed me. You have failed society. You have failed those poor pallid, wretched, suffering, half-cared-for and neglected men and women and children in that pest-house over there. You had the treasure of the earth in your hand and you threw it away, and for what, can you tell me? For the comfort and

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ease of your poor, puling, miserable soul; because you could not stand conditions. Do they not stand them—and poverty and misfortune and wretchedness beside?

“After your years of training you could enter the field of social service, equipped to do battle, to officer enlistments, direct campaigns, lead forlorn hopes to victory; could bring your invention, your knowledge and experience to help the solving of our great civic problem. That is what I wanted of you—that is what my eyes could see for you far into the future.

“And you lose all this, you give it all up because a woman jumps out of the window, because you are weak enough to lie for a fellow student—your wretched individualism, your self-righteousness!”

He stopped, he was standing over her; she was white, swaying under the bitter blows of his sharp invective and accusation.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Barnard. I—I feel very strongly on this matter; I feel that the hospital needs women, the very best, of the highest type, not the middle-class unenlightened woman who goes in merely to learn nursing as a livelihood: there isn’t one chance in a thousand of our getting any help from these women. It is in the women of your caste that we have hopes. I was strongly impressed, unfortunately and quite

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wrongly it seems, with your seriousness of purpose. I thought I had found a woman who would make the defence of the sick and unfortunate her life-work, who would labor and suffer with them down to any depth to learn how to help them. I was mistaken, that is all.

"You went there to gather experiences as you go to a play to be amused; you wanted to see life and suffering that it might entertain you,—the wasting of the heart's blood of our brothers and sisters,—that you might add to the gaiety and variety of your existence.

"I trust that you will find some work, some vocation in life more congenial to your taste and making less demand on character." He held the door open for her to pass out.

Somehow she got out of the building and down the street to the woman's club where she was to meet Barbara.

"We are going to the Hunts' for tea," Mrs. Brewster announced; "we are terribly late but we must go anyway. I haven't been there for months, Edith would be cross if she were anybody else. I 'phoned out and she quite particularly wanted to see me; I asked if I might bring you, so you see we have to go," she finished, getting into her cab.

Ruth Anne did not seem to hear what she was

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saying; she was still and staring. Barbara was quick to see her suffering.

"My dear, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, no," Ruth Anne answered, whispering. She gave a queer unnatural little laugh. "I—I guess, I've had a fall—I don't know but it's something like that. I shall be all right presently;" a wintry bitter sort of smile curled her lips. "Never mind, it isn't worth while bothering about."

"We won't go to Edith's, I'll 'phone her, we'll go to the station and go home." Barbara was alarmed at her quietness, her set face and tight lips.

"No, no, don't you dare. I will go. I won't give up; I won't be foolish; I'm all right now," she continued, shaking her head,—“I want to see people, to talk, to be gay and foolish. Thinking is so terrible.”

Barbara smiled at the picture of gaiety this wan dispirited little creature would make, but kept silent; truly the child had an infinite variety of troublesome and almost incomprehensible moods.

By some tremendous effort of will Ruth Anne was the conventional, smiling, chattering young society woman when they reached Edith's; Barbara saw her cheeks were burning, her eyes had a weird and brilliant light, her mood had re-

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sponded to some insistent demand made upon it. She had put her suffering, her shock of whatever sort it was, quite successfully into the background.

She responded gaily to Edith's greetings, shook hands with John Hunt, saw Barbara kissed all around impartially by Edith's husband and John and gave it but passing notice; this was a day of strange occurrences, nothing could surprise her further.

Barbara was evidently a family favorite; the clan seemed to claim her for one of them; William hailed her as he saluted her:

"Well, my dear Barb, it's good to see you—you're as grand as ever, aren't you? Did you ever see anything so splendid, Ede? You'll make them sit tight another ten years yet, Barbara." It was delightfully intimate and Barbara was laughing.

John was talking to Ruth Anne of the capital, the recess, politics, its fascinations and engrossing elements. He was glad she had left the hospital; now they would all see something of her. Barbara was a brick, she could do anything—running a neighborhood house would be play for her; it was fine she was with her, she was so stimulating and helpful. "We don't know what we'd do without her, when something happens and we need somebody: and we never could have

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a dinner-party without her." Ruth Anne was bewildered by John's talk of Barbara, and she must have looked it; for Edith came over to the rescue and talked about hospital matters, things going on at the clubs, plays she had seen, subscriptions to a new theatre fund, all the fashionable subjects. They must come in and dine soon. She would arrange it with Barbara. They had a box at the opera for Tuesday night. Of course they must come, it was Caruso. Yes, it was very interesting having John at the heart of things at the capital, it kept them all in touch not only with state but with the national things. They were going to elect a new senator soon to fill Carter's seat—that was what John got into the assembly for, to send the right man to Washington, that was the big thing in this year's work, and so on.

Ruth Anne's head was in a whirl; oh, it had been a damnable day!

XI

ONE wild April morning Webster received at the hospital a note from Ruth Anne asking him to meet her at 20 Bishop's Place at twelve o'clock. It was Saturday and his wards were heavier than usual, his junior could not handle the work alone, and it took a full hour to find a senior and sign off.

Her notes were always short and imperative, "Come to-morrow," or "Do not come on Sunday," or "I want to see you at once. Lunch with me." This whimsical arbitrariness pleased him, it gave to each interview the flavor of the unexpected, an element of importance to their joint affairs, and yet in these affairs he never seemed to progress; love-making was all at once forbidden, he was back almost where he had been all winter before their adventure, save for the delightful assurance that he might go on loving her, that she wished it; she permitted him to see her often but he might not again speak of his love, a vain prohibition since they were never together a moment without both being keenly conscious of it. Sometimes when she was cold, thoughtful, reserved, too serious, he wondered if after all their affair had not reached its high tide there in those few moments when he had

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held her, felt her body yielding, giving, and had kissed her. Her beauty was so alluring, her lips so strange and unaccustomed until they yielded too in tremulous waves of emotion.

One phase of her subsequent and constant attitude toward him struck him with the greater force since he was just then immersed in the absorbing study of the problem of sex psychology. Her evident ignorance of the nature of a man's love, her desire to master the subject before she gave her love to him, were a source of infinite amusement not unmingled with alarm; how far she would find it necessary to lead him in order to study him to her satisfaction, he could only conjecture. He felt at these times like the unfortunate patient in a clinic who finds that conditions in his body which he had always considered normal were really the mysterious symptoms of some dread disease which his tormentors were endeavoring to fix upon him.

She seemed at times prepared to go to any length in her investigations and at other times mystifyingly reticent, as though she had discovered some secret and elusive symptom and feared lest in some unguarded moment the knowledge of it should escape her. She bade him come and go, and talk and keep silent, exhibit himself under every conceivable condition. She had once given him the high permission to write her love-letters and he did,—very good ones he thought, which

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she never answered. If, as she said, her one condition of his loving her was that she should wait and see, she surely was taking time to see all.

There was after all a great deal to see even from his very limited standpoint. It was as Edith had said of her; she was the real thing, the best thing, so much so that it was not possible to mistake it. It was in the quite exquisite mould of her oval face, in the holding of her head and her whole bearing. A fearless direct look of the eyes and clearness of gaze, the clearness and singleness of a child, the alert desire, to see and to learn, of a traveller in a strange country, yet the *savoir-faire* of a many-tongued and keen-visioned traveller. Her mouth was all soft curves and sweetness, with an eager mobility which yet could not take away its repose. She was tranquil to the point of being disconcerting. She accepted you as you were and yet insistently demanded that you be a better and higher and more important thing than you knew yourself for; she in her great faculty of recognition and comprehension could see it, and alas! you must needs somehow desperately stumble up to it. Somehow, though, the light blinded your eyes, for the clear liquid tones of her voice called you, on and on like the call in the woods of a nymph whose notes gave vague strange promises of joy.

Ruth Anne was stubbornly blind to her physi-

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cal charm as a basis of attraction to the conquering sex. That no man had made love to her until she was twenty-six was proof enough of her plainness, whatever other people had said to her about her attractiveness. The supreme test of beauty had failed. Even Webster in telling her his love did not indicate in any way that one of the contributing causes of the trouble—to use a clinical figure—was her beauty. She was so convinced of this sad lack, that she had felt the necessity of cultivating what she considered to be a very inadequate substitute: that was an absorbed interest in the affairs of other people (with the element of curiosity entirely absent, however), and an increased degree of tenderness and sympathy and thoughtfulness to all about her which became really the final touch to her bewildering attractiveness.

Webster was wondering what particular line her investigations would take to-day, what new field of conjecture she would probe with those delicate and already gory fingers, and why she had chosen the psychically tragic ground of the house on Bishop's Place for a meeting. She had told him the tenants had been evicted and that the place was being put in proper order, but he was unprepared for the absolute change of countenance the whole place had assumed since his visit in the hours of sinister darkness and storm.

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The lawn had been rolled and seeded, thick clumps of shrubs set out and big trees transplanted on the corner which had been the dumping place for the street. The missing sections of iron fence had been replaced and all painted, the alley swept clean like a New England door-yard, flower-beds were freshly spaded up and tulips and hyacinths were poking their heads through well-ordered clean soil.

The house had a deep wooden porch built about three sides of it and painted pure white in effective contrast to the yellow of its stone walls; the many windows were curtained with immaculate white muslin. The whole place was like a little girl dressed freshly for a party and gone out to play in a gutter; the other houses, senile and decrepit, seemed to leer at Bishop's House in its obtrusive cleanness and health; they were unfriendly, flaunting their indecencies and filth in her face.

Ruth Anne threw the door open and welcomed him with both hands; this was her secret, this was her surprise, this was what she had been doing.

"Dr. Webster, you will be pleased to know that this is a neighborhood settlement known as Bishop's House. You are being shown through by the personal courtesy of the head resident, R. A. Barnard."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Barnard!" He

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looked about the clean painted rooms, the waxed floors, the spotless furnishings all in white.

"So this is what you have made of that vile place. God, I can never forget it!"

"No, nor I. I don't want to. I want to remember, so that I shall not forget the need, the wrong, the neglect that made it possible." She stopped a moment.

"I love it already—it has an overpowering significance to me. I want it to be a place of refuge, a garden spot; I want it to blossom like a rose and send its sweetness far, far out into the thick foul air. Do help me to believe that it will; help me to learn how, there's so much to do. My dear, you can't know what this means to me to have it just as it is now even, empty. I know it is an influence for good all about, and to me it means the beginning of my expiation of a wrong, a weakness, a wicked dangerous ignorance covering useless years."

Her tone became dreamy:

"And when it's filled with women learning to sew, and to bathe their babies, and prepare food and sterilize bottles, and the nursery and the porches and cribs are filled with little ones from hot stifling tenements, it will be wonderful. We are going to do it, Barbara and I. I didn't have money enough, but together we can do it."

She showed him the rooms as they were arranged for their different uses, office, reading-

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and rest-rooms, nursery and play-room and porch for large children, with steps leading down to the garden; upstairs, mothers' sewing-room, infants' nursery and sleeping porch. There would be lessons in cooking in the kitchen and lessons in sterilizing with hundreds of bottles and measures and pitchers and funnels and boilers.

"I suppose only a few will come at first, but we are having cards printed in Yiddish, Polish, and Italian, announcing the opening of the day nursery and the days for classes. We are moving in Monday. It's all ready. And then you are to come and look after them when they are sick—you are appointed physician in ordinary. I'm going to make all my friends work, there'll be so much to do, and Barbara and I really don't know anything, we'll have it all to learn."

The pale spring sunlight was filling the big airy room where she finally brought him to sit; the house was empty, everything was finished, everyone gone, yet the house was filled with all that was within them, teeming with a feeling of life; there was an intimacy about sitting there together before the fire talking of plans and methods, of possible lectures, later perhaps a free dispensary, garden space for children's flower-beds, the kind of books for the reading-room, the most valuable periodicals in the different languages,—a hundred details to be discussed and determined upon.

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Ruth Anne was talking all around and about in diverse directions from the subject she had in mind when she sent for him. She could not put it off any longer. It had obsessed her since her interview with Dr. Hollander, when it had come to her in a vivid flash that she was doing the same reprehensible thing, dishonorable and selfish thing, with Webster, that she had done at the hospital. His exploitation was quite a part of her general scheme of individualism, that was clear, and she must tell him.

"I wanted you to come and see this house and know about my plans and that I am not really all selfish and all bad, that you might have this as a basis of some little good opinion of me after I have told you what I see and how I feel about our relationship. It is wrong and unfair, it can not go on, you must see that. I don't love you—I am not going to love you, and I can't let you go on loving me any longer under false pretences." She was speaking vehemently, rapidly.

"I didn't realize what I was doing when I let you make love to me, when I told you to go on loving me, that I wished it. I did a wicked, selfish thing—perhaps an essentially immoral thing, but I have not thought that out yet. No, no, do not stop me, you must let me say it all. I wanted you to love me from the first, there was so much in you that was fine and admirable. I thought what a wonderful experience it would

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be if you should love me; I wished to have your love without thought of giving anything in return. I didn't want to love you nor to love anyone. I simply wanted to know what love was, to learn about it, to feel its persuasion and power; that is why I let you make love to me. Later I thought it would complete and round out my experience if I should learn to love you,—I thought it was something communicable like disease, and I wanted to take it from you in some miraculous way. I was vastly interested in love and the physical manifestation of it: in the touch of your body, the trembling of your hands, the vibration of your voice, the passionate touch of your hand on my flesh, the responsive thrill of every nerve, the warning note of hot blood surging through me, the whole reply of the physical body to your demand,—and my mind, the real me, not touched at all, standing off critically and taking notes on the phenomena. All this was going on when something brought me to my senses, showed me my gross indecency, my immodesty of soul that would permit her body this dangerous and alluring experience.

“Yes, yes, it was all just as I have told you, only worse. I can't describe it, it's too horrible, it isn't to be put into words; and I dared, dared to ask an accounting of you of your stewardship

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over your body, demanded it as though I were all pure and just and right.

"Now since I see it, since I know what it is, I know that *that* must not come first. My mind must love first. This is all a lesson you have given me, as I told you those patients give their bodies for you to learn from,—you have given me yours for a lesson.

"I know that you have given me more than that. You have given me the bright good love of your soul. I have seen it always there before you told me. That will always be precious to me. I shall have a grateful tender feeling for you, like a mother for her first-born. There will never be any love with just the bloom on it that yours has. I know you understand when I say there can be no more love or thought of love between us."

Her voice was choked with tears.

"Do you forgive me? I want to start just here, new and clean and fresh; if you love me you will forgive me."

She waited for him to speak, he had interrupted her again and again with hoarse protests, and now he sat dumb, tense and gray.

He rose, a sudden light flashed in his face.

"I forgive you? Forgive *you*! You don't know—you haven't after all learned what love is. I *love* you—Ruth Anne."

XII

MOTHER-IN-LAW being away for a week-end, Tom Lawrence was alone in his big house and Barbara asked him to dinner. She made quite an event of it, had Ruth Anne put away her black and put on a handsome white gown with the violets Webster had given her at the train; for herself she wore a soft trailing dark thing with a gold fillet binding her hair, and her bishop's chain and cross of heavy gold hanging to her waist over a very bare neck. It would have been shockingly low on anyone else, but Barbara could wear almost no bodice at all and not shock anybody; she was like a statue which it would be prudery to clothe.

Lawrence came over in the cool spring twilight, a long cape thrown over his shoulders, giving with his erect carriage an air of the soldier.

Ruth Anne had not seen him at close range before. She found him now quite the handsomest man she had seen anywhere; he ought to have been a grand-duke or a prince, she thought, where he would be constantly on view; he was very tall even when standing beside Barbara, who was of strikingly unusual height. He had a precise and formal manner and yet a deference of atten-

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tion most personal and flattering. His conversation was very easy and entertaining, a trifle absorbed perhaps, yet of a lightness of strange consistency for a man who was supposed to be eating his heart out over his wife's desertion. It was three years since any one had seen them together and that was only at luncheon at his club on a chance day when she was in town. Ruth Anne was devilishly tempted to ask after her—quickly, out of the blue—to see if it *would* disconcert him, but she dared not, having no pretext and never having seen the lady. Mrs. Brewster, hating to appear to avoid the subject, presently asked in a matter-of-course manner where Helena was campaigning now, and Lawrence replied, Texas, and talked smoothly and quite charmingly of the growth of the movement in the South and the states that would come in at the next election. The field-work was very heavy, he understood, but they did not mind that since results were coming; one would almost have thought him a suffragist himself so familiar was he with the campaign phrases and so ready with their triumphs and amusing adventures.

The talk went on to the settlement about which Lawrence seemed to know already, and to have distinct ideas on details of management and development, much to Ruth Anne's surprise, but after all, they must have talked of something

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beside woman's suffrage on those long walks all winter.

He was free in giving expression to his surprise and pain at their early departure for Bishop's House, leaving the spring in the country, one of the wonderful springs of which there are so few left for those of us who are forty.

Barbara smiled.

"I'm keeping the house open,"—He murmured his pleasure and she went on,—“We shall want to run away some day, I am sure. Ruth Anne doesn't know what a summer is over there away from the bay. I'm afraid she won't stand it very well. You are staying here for the summer?”

“Yes; this is as good as anywhere, and that traction merger is due to come up before the Assembly and it is the dickens. We don't seem to get anywhere with it.”

Ruth Anne wondered about it, she would ask Hunt when she saw him.

“Same old gang bucking it?” asked Barbara. He frowned and nodded absent-mindedly.

“Not bucking it,—I wish to heaven they would, we could get somewhere then, at least know the personnel of the opposition. They won't let it come up. This senatorial muddle is on. There'll be a deadlock and then no more business this session.”

“You poor capitalists,” mocked Barbara.

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They were having their coffee and cordials in the long living-room. Lawrence was standing in the dim shadows making out some new pictures Barbara indicated as having just come from the art-shop. That one she got in Munich and the other, the little etching, in London, he recognized it of course.

"The Embankment, by all that's holy!"

An odd incredulous expression flashed over his dark face. "Why?"

"It's my hair-shirt," said Mrs. Brewster quietly.

"It's a very public place to hang a hair-shirt," interposed Ruth Anne, "why not hang it at least in your study?"

"I'd see it too often there; sometimes perhaps when I didn't need it."

"So you hang it here in plain sight when you ask me to dinner?" He scowled at the fire, then looked up with a delightful smile, "Isn't it a trifle antiquated in pattern?"—he was whimsically regarding the picture again,—“and then it isn't your shirt anyway, it's mine.”

This was all too clever for Ruth Anne.

Barbara was looking out into the moonlight.

"It's a wonderful night for a walk."

Ruth Anne would not go. She had learned the trick of letter-writing, through long sojourns in English country houses, but she brought Barbara's wrap, asked for the dog and watched

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them away in the silvery gray light, down the soft hazy path between knotted shrubs and under dark burgeoning branches.

There went the woman of forty, ignoring conventions as ever, out for a moonlight stroll on a spring night with that dangerous thing, an unhappy and lonely man. Anyway, Mrs. Brewster could keep the situation in hand, whatever it was, and she was sure now there was one. It was nonsense of course, it must be the spring and the moonshine gone to her own head, but she had had all through dinner, vague and—now that they were gone out together—more distinct yet still rare glimpses of hidden vistas, of quite wonderful things which the touch of a hand, nay, even the movement of so much as a finger would reveal. Things behind that insistent nonchalance of hers, and barely kept in the background by his positive negativeness of attitude.

That was the compensation for being forty, a rich past filled with everything to make for one's absolute ease and oneness with a man.

She and Jack, Barbara's terrier, turned from the window, found a cozy nook with pillows in the hall, read poetry for a while, switched off the lamp and finally dozed.

Jack began whining plaintively at the door, which opened and let in a rush of air that brought her to the instant awareness of voices near her, speaking in tense tones.

RUTH ANNE

"So, it is good-by to-night?"

"Yes."

"You remember that night, the autumn night on the downs—all night in the frost and silver—and the dawn——"

Barbara did not answer. Ruth Anne could hear both of their quick hard breaths beating one against the other; there was a soft stir, the rustle of a gown being crushed, a long slow kiss, a sob.

"Oh, don't, please don't. I can't bear it."

The man was gone, his long firm strides taking him rapidly down the path and across the drive into his own bare woods filled with pale light.

Ruth Anne waited breathlessly for Barbara to move. She did not; she could feel her leaning against the casement near to her, standing braced as against some rock for defense. Jack whined and came back to her.

"Barbara, Barbara——"

"Yes, dear," she took a step into the hall and turned on the light, "where are you?"

"I was here, right here all the time. I heard; I couldn't help it. Forgive me. I dared not speak; it seemed better to hear than to interrupt—you understand, don't you——"

"Yes, dear," she put her arms around Ruth Anne and together they went upstairs, "you had to know some time, it's just as well now."

XIII

MRS. BREWSTER pushed Ruth Anne into her room :

“ Wait for me. I’ll come in a minute.”

She went into her sleeping-room and closed the door, leaning with her back against it as though to keep some one out. That was what she had been doing all her life. Keeping people out lest, once inside that door, they could see the real Barbara, the Barbara she lived with beneath her lofty pose of serenity, of self-sufficiency, of beauty, of very superior and assured contentment with the world and what it had brought her.

As she walked about thinking rapidly, she became conscious of wet feet and damp skirts, and still selecting and deciding, she changed shoes and gown, taking the pins out of her hair and letting the braids fall. Walking to and fro with an added sense of physical freedom, she took her resolution quickly and crossed the hall into her guest’s room.

Ruth Anne looked up as the majestic figure filled the doorway. Here was a new Barbara, one she had never seen before, sad-eyed and shadowy, appealing and tender.

“ My husband was a drunkard. I left him. I

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fell in love with another man. This is the other man; that is all."

Ruth Anne stopped twisting Jack's ears and pushed away the dog, who lay down grumbling at his mistress' feet.

"Barbara, how brutal!"

"Isn't it? but life is brutal. It's elemental—shorn of all its trappings. Life is terror and heartbreak and disappointment and sorrow; these are its splendors."

All this her mother had said to her, and Dr. Hollander; and now Barbara. How these people knew suffering!

"Ah! that's your symphony too," sighed Ruth Anne sitting down at Barbara's feet and leaning back against her.

"I was only twenty when I married Mr. Brewster. He was Edith's brother—Edith Hunt was Edith Brewster. The early years of my marriage were filled with the long series of doubts, uncertainties, fears, and disillusion of the woman who is married to a dissipated man. There had been drinking men in both the maternal and paternal ancestry for generations, and somehow they had made money and prospered and had the quality of loveliness which won and kept them friends; but the strain when it reached his generation had become so

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degenerate that there was no character, no strength, no virility, nothing.

"I knew that he drank, that he must have led a somewhat irregular life in his thirty-five years, but women didn't think about those things then so much as they do now. I thought that all Robert needed to keep him straight was the right kind of wife. I knew nothing about marriage; it wasn't considered delicate to tell young girls things—or young men either for that matter. The facts of life were indecencies.

"My idea of wifedom was of something that was merged into a man, something that lost its own individuality. That a woman has a life of her own to live, apart from her husband's, that she has her honor to keep, came to me only through years of bitter suffering. I had never conceived a woman as any other than a complement to man, to live in him and for him. Of course there is no such nonsense about marriage now. I tried to be that kind of wife for five years.

"People ceased to ask us anywhere. I had to go out alone or not at all to plays and amusements, my husband was always 'ill.' Life became intolerable where everyone knew us, and we went to travel; but it was everywhere the same, Robert insensible in the bar-rooms and cafés while I ate alone, walked alone, drove

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alone—lived in galleries and libraries, moped about killing time. Then there were times of illness, terrible delirious illness, frightful days and nights.

“Finally something roused me, waked me suddenly to the futility of my life, to its hopeless degradation and shame. Perhaps just for a moment illumined in some vivid flash I saw an ideal, and to struggle toward it, to be free to win that high place I must be alone.

“It was in London the crisis came. We were staying at a hotel, we could never go anywhere to visit. The Sudleys were staying at their town house with Tom Lawrence for their guest; he was with Lord Sudley at Heidelberg. They had called to take me driving; I had not seen Robert since the afternoon before. I had stayed in in case he came back or was brought back, as I easily visioned, by the police, either injured or dead. I often and often hoped he might be half killed so that he would lie in bed peaceful weeks being patched together. I would at least then know where he was and not turn wide-eyed and gasping every time the door opened. I used to sit and see hundreds of wives all over the world sitting waiting with loneliness and terror and with that same wicked thought in their hearts. Can't you see them, stiff from fatigue listening at doors, peering out from behind win-

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dow draperies, watching every passing cab, straining ears at every approaching step, in hotels, in palaces, in tenements, everywhere? Waiting, I amused myself picturing interiors, faces, clothing of velvets and rags—in panorama they passed through my vigil. Well, that is what I had been doing since the early morning when they came to take me for a drive and to have tea at Mary's. I had hardly seen them at all, though it was a year since I had visited my sister. I went with them, and I remember tipping the door porter to look after Mr. Brewster if he returned.

"We left the carriage and got out for a walk at the Embankment (you remember the picture last night?)—that was the very spot, with all that historic beauty and the afternoon crowds of people, where I met my crowning humiliation. It was just the one thing too much: my strength was gone, I could not stand alone any longer.

"We were passing people the Sudleys knew, bowing and stopping to chat, when a police whistle startled us just at our ears. Another Bobby came running past, a crowd was gathering about a man lying bloody and prostrate in the footway. The two officers were lifting him, Lawrence and Lord Sudley made way for us to pass out of the curious rabble, and as we passed I saw the man's face. It was my husband! I called to Lord Sudley. The officer saluted, rec-

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ognizing him, and they soon had Robert in the carriage and we were driving to our hotel.

“He had been knocked down by a ’bus or cab in the street, and half insensible had somehow dragged himself there. There were only some ribs and a shoulder broken and his head cut. I took care of him until he was well, put him on a steamer and sent him home. That was the last time I ever saw him, at the boat-rail, his hat in his hand waving to me gaily, as though he were leaving me for a holiday. His befogged brain could not grasp that it was farewell; he expected me to follow on the next boat.

“I went to the Sudleys’ country place for the autumn, not with a broken heart at all, far from it; it was something very different. I had had for all these years a stunned feeling as of some dumb creature being dragged about through the mire by some madman, contaminated by the touch of his body, by his weaknesses and indecencies.

“Not having love, not knowing even then what it was, I had all unconsciously, desperately, long before put something else in its place: that was the old-fashioned thing known as ‘wifely duty.’ I had allowed myself to be dragged at the end of his chain because I thought it my duty as a wife to stick to him for better or for worse, but that was all, it had been a passive submission

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to destiny. And now I had not even a broken heart to show for my years of bondage.

"I was adrift, not afraid or unhappy, almost peacefully resting, thinking, dreaming, not even paddling about to get my bearings or explore the shores of this beautiful sea; there was no curiosity as to where my frail craft would take me.

"There were many guests at Eagles' Croft, but I saw little of them. It was sufficient to be alone; it was so miraculous not to be waiting for heavy uncertain footsteps, for foul words, or battling with the terrors of waiting hours.

"There was a very great amount of personal liberty at the Sudleys',—guests came and 'went on,' married women flirted and gambled, as they did everywhere in the days of the late king. Tom Lawrence was staying for the shooting, and after a time I rode and dressed and danced and gamed with the others, though we two were always seeking each other, making casual occasions to be alone together.

"One night when the dancing broke up at two I was still untired, and restless with a new energy that had come to me, I went out into the garden with Tom. Two or three other people were straying about on the bare leaf-blown terraces occupied with their own engrossing affairs; they finally drifted in and we followed for fur-lined coats and then went out again down to the sea.

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It was a good mile in clear white moonlight, crisp and frosty. We walked on the beach—I remember utterly ruining a very beautiful gown—and sat on the rocks until dawn.

“We went home in the earliest gray light, hoar frost everywhere, its pointed silvery crystals fringing woods and downs.

“That night revealed much to us both; they are the perfect hours of my life, hours on the heights. All I have had in all my life!”

Barbara’s hands clasped her listener about the neck with a soft caressing dreamy touch in her fingertips, vibrating with each word.

“He said he would go in the morning; I said yes, he must. When should he see me again? I could not tell him, I should not return to America for some time. And then? Then nothing, I could not see any further. I was like one blinded by a great light.

“We went in, he to pack, I to stand at my window and see the red sun rise on that glory of sparkling frost, and turn into full day. I could see my way now dimly, dimly, a long gray pathway which I must tread humbly, carefully, holding tight to the chalice in my heart.

“I stayed in England for a year and then returned to America—I took my house back, I began seeing old friends and going out; people asked after my husband at first in just the way

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they ask after Mrs. Lawrence now, and then they stopped. When other people began coming to the house again, Tom Lawrence came too.

“I had been brought up with an abhorrence for divorce,—this was part of my puritanical conception of the whole duty of a wife. At first to be separated seemed enough, to be free from the terrors of the night, the degradations of the day, to have my friends again. Then I began to want more than life was giving me. I was being cheated and defrauded out of everything by what had become an absurd and meaningless tie. Still I hesitated, was reticent of decision, I groped about in the twilight of my desires, fearing to come out into the glare of publicity and reach out my hand for what I wanted.

“We talked often intimately of life and its meaning and responsibilities, of the need of living direct lives, virile and purposeful, of choosing our pathway and pursuing it; but dullard that I was, I could not see what he was preaching. He finally tired of the waiting game, of my blindness, my lack of courage, my lack of faith in him and in our love. He went abroad again. I felt then as though I had sent him away, that I had disappointed him—that I was not as strong as he had thought me.

“I took steps at once for a divorce: it was very simple, there was no defence, it was soon over

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and I was free. I wanted Tom madly; it seemed I could not wait his return, the years had become so futile, so interminable. Of course I could not marry for a year, so I kept silence; it would make his time of waiting the shorter, but I counted the days.

"Then the disaster which had set itself to destroy me for my weakness and stupidity, my delaying, my compromising with my miserable conscience, my diseased and perverted sense of duty, for all the mistakes and follies of my wasted womanhood—that stalking stealthy disaster overtook me. Tom Lawrence married an American girl in London and brought her back with him."

Barbara rose and walked about in the midnight stillness of the shadowy room; her movement was in long strides like some fierce caged thing, her chain and cross gleaming as she came back into the light.

"And the old love has come back, not so quiet and sane, more dominating and insistent,—it's maddening to be with him after all these years."

In speaking again, which she did only after an interval for the quieting of her aroused and turbulent emotions, she came back to herself again, the Barbara Ruth Anne had known, a surer and stronger woman.

RUTH ANNE

"Forgive me if it's been terrible, dear; I haven't told you half."

To-night the House in the Woods was full of whispers and mystery. This was one of the nights Barbara could not sleep; her mind was a place of seething tumults, like wild swift waters rushing over rocks. She was stirred to her very depths by her talk with Ruth Anne, stirred with this mutation of purpose with the vibrant impulse of the plunge into a strange sea.

Life had eluded her, slipped from her grasp, always vanished when she was about to seize it. Would Bishop's House still leave her hands empty? She was reaching them out for one last time—hands that still were full of power and strong desire.

She stood at her window as she had stood an early morning long ago waiting for the dawn, with hope again in her heart, hugged tight with clasped hands to her broad bosom. Out in the dark of the night she could see dimly down the arches of the forest trees the great vaulted aisles of some temple. Unbelieving pagan that she was, she still kept the vision, her altar fires burning.

XIV

BISHOP'S PLACE was proud of Bishop's House, proud of being at last found out to be bad enough to need reforming. The toughest and heaviest wing of the K-street gang lived in Bishop's Place and still half the mothers of the Place went out to the reform school on visiting Thursdays. The best thing that could happen to any boy in the ward was to be sent to the reform school, and the mothers urged good behavior on the cubs and counted the days until they came out. As for girls, there were little ones by scores mothering their even smaller brothers and sisters, but there were none of the age of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—that was the vanishing age; they reappeared later sometimes with babies, sometimes with husbands or lovers but more often alone, lined, haggard and thin, to go to the drudgery of the sweat-shops or to the more precarious existence of the street. The foreign-born women bore children rapidly, the others, wiser, bore none at all; their bodies were their income-producing capital. Husbands, lovers, brothers staggered in and out of doorways, a weather-eye on Bishop's House with its brightly-burning street light at

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the gateway and its ever-ready welcome day or night.

One May morning the big rooming-house across the street had vomited forth its nomads and filthy furnishings, and its infamies had gone up K street to a more congenial milieu. Some mysterious influence had emptied it and cleaned it up, and now decent-looking Italian families were moving into its two- and three-room tenements. A saloon abutting on the alley had gone out of business and left the old building staggering and vacant on the corner; no one was courageous enough to open another place there until the settlement should be proved a failure. On the opposite corner a popular saloon still flourished noisily with its vile drinking-rooms for women in the rear and furnished rooms to rent above. John Hunt had tried to get this place closed, but the mayor had told him that Barney Costello was a politician to be feared and best let alone. Other things Hunt had been able to do for them, with the touch of Aladdin; the alley was paved, the street cleaned and repaired and lighted, much to the disgust of the residents, who promptly smashed all of the globes the first night after they were put in. Altogether Bishop's Place had taken on airs and graces as the summer advanced. A few courageous plants were sprouting here and there in corners of the hard trampled

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earth by fences and basement windows and there were boxes of pale green growing things on roofs and back porches. Toddling children, instead of howling in the sun or falling off steps while their mothers placidly sat in doorways making button-holes or screamed shrilly at them from upper windows, according to nationality and temperament, were now sliding and swinging, and playing in sand piles in the big yard opposite behind the safety of the high iron fence. To be sure the women who sent their children there to play and be cared for were expected to go once a week for lessons in cooking and sewing and such, but then that didn't *hurt* anybody and it was a comfort to have the young ones out of the way.

The big white house so cool and inviting was at first almost empty, only the most timorous accepting its hospitality, but early in June the hot days came and there was a rush for the nursery. Babies appeared like magic, no one could have dreamed there were so many in the street,—white, fretful, thin little mites, none of them well, none ill enough for the hospital, but all needing careful feeding. Dr. Webster had secured the service of a class-mate who had located in the slum, for attendance on the babies. Dr. Mahoney gave generously of his time and had quite the same spirit of gentleness and service that had attracted Ruth Anne so instantly to the City

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Hospital interne. It was wonderful how many were ready to help the minute one said babies to them. Edith, with her really unusual ability as an organizer, threw the leaven of a genuine and eager enthusiasm into the house and worked wonders on opening day, dispensing smiles, tea, and cakes with unvarying charm to mothers and visiting settlement workers alike. She had later come to help in the sewing-classes; it was found a great many helpers were needed, and infants' nurses were expensive. Edith saw at once the need of a trained social service worker, and found one in the person of Miss Craig, a plain-faced, small, quiet young woman with a beautiful Scotch complexion and hair and cool gray eyes; her whole make-up was capable, but unsympathetic to Ruth Anne's mind,—however, Edith declared those were just the things they did need in their mad, hot-headed dash at philanthropy, and since settlement work *was* the fashion, one of her clubs would pay the young woman. It would not do to refuse; it was a club of wealthy idle women and they might furnish teachers or help in other ways later. There would be books to keep; records of every applicant, age, nationality, vocation, assistance if given, and results where obvious. It really was important to know whether a woman's husband had been hung for murder or was only in the city prison, in order to render her

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and her children intelligent and effective assistance, and these investigations took a great deal of time. Also, and this was a big thing, Miss Craig spoke Polish and the allied languages; Barbara and Ruth Anne could manage Italian, but there were Litts, Poles and Huns all around who were the legitimate wards of Bishop's House, and must be brought under its influence. Miss Craig fitted into the house quietly and efficiently at once; they wondered how they could have thought of getting on without her, and so did Miss Craig, since she was occupied almost altogether in preventing the two residents from doing rash and impractical things, while in her heart she sat at their feet, their willing slave and quite unconsciously, since she was—though Scotch and consequently economical of her emotions as of everything else—still susceptible to the fascination which very beautiful women have over their plainer sisters.

Dr. Webster came to Bishop's House many times after the day that had witnessed for him its apotheosis, and his subordination from the high place of lover to that of a privileged and intimate friend. His was an instance of the perfect friendship that can grow up between a man and woman out of a spontaneous and unreasoning love. The propinquity so encouraging to his passion was also a force in the develop-

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ment of the milder and more permanent relationship. They had free and happy times together with the babies, there was none of the awkward and self-conscious atmosphere which often hampers and restricts intercourse which has had the high ground of passion for its meeting-place. Their present relation seemed the normal one since Ruth Anne had gotten herself in hand, and she thought with much shame of the impatient and eager desire of their earlier meetings, her consuming wish that he would touch her. Her importunate readiness for his kisses was a sickening reproach to her.

For Webster the entire situation had become full of unusual elements; the ingenuous surface overlying depths once holding vibrating sensations and passionate emotions, was strange in its placidity, he was always looking for a break in its smoothness. It was this ease and frankness that constituted its strongest claim for prolongation and not that anything more was to be expected of the lady than she had already so generously given him.

In Ruth Anne herself there was a mutability of mood, an underlying swiftness of full and passionate expression that seemed increasing rather than abating. It was not expressed in words, it would not have been discussable as a tangible basis for belief that she was changing

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and yet something was changing her. Taking a long view of her temperamental idiosyncrasies he was conscious in some subtle way, miraculous to the masculine density, that it was someone else than himself who was responsible for the lights and shadows that played about her ever-increasing brilliancy and depths.

He was going away so soon now that he would not have a chance to test his vaguely-formed theory, and convinced that nothing could change his own destiny at her hands was satisfied to go, leaving her engrossed in her new environment within the House, with Mrs. Brewster and whomever else it might be that held her new interest. He felt sure she had now her feet on solid ground, that she was sure of herself and, whatever the temptation, would not err in choosing a pathway now that the trail was broken. She had seemed to be illumined suddenly with flashes like those from clouds—terrifying flashes they must have been to give her a vision so clear. With what that vision had taught her still within her soul, he was content to leave her.

He came into the office one morning very freshly groomed, in gray flannels and panama hat, his eyes smiling as always, a fresh boyish laugh as he met Ruth Anne in the hall holding a baby and cooing out Italian endearments to it in intervals of answering to a story of supplica-

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tion from a dark little woman standing before her.

Webster waited, talking to Miss Craig, who did not at all approve of so many good-looking young men breezing in at all hours of the day and night; she was very severe with his inconsequence as he leaned over the desk discussing trivialities of the day. Presently Ruth Anne gave the 'bambino' to Miss Craig to take to the nursery and turned to Webster. She saw an unusual excitement in his manner; she knew he was keyed up to something.

"Well, what is it?" she demanded.

"Where's Mrs. Brewster?"

"She's giving Tommy Jonski his bottle in the nursery," said Ruth Anne, calling her. "Come on up. You couldn't keep her out of the nursery at feeding-time. I think she'd rather feed a baby than do anything else in the world."

"Dr. Webster, how can we put babies to sleep and you in roars of laughter on the stairs? What do you want?" was Barbara's greeting.

"Maria Cavaletti came back with her baby again. She's willing to trust it to us now that it is ill and her 'sposo' threw it under the bed last night; it's all black and blue. Miss Craig says there isn't a doubt but he'll kill them both some day. But the doctor has come to see you."

"To see both of you," he corrected, sitting

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down in the breeze, mopping his face and adjusting his trouser-knees. "It's about a young woman in maternity. Lisa, we call her,—she says her name is Lizzie but she is so like 'La Gioconda.' She has us all in a funk for fear she will kill her baby before she leaves the hospital, and she swears she will desert her as soon as she gets out. It's a week old and a splendid baby, but Lisa is one fiend, the nurses can't do anything with her. She lies on the child, she refuses to feed it, she let it slip off the bed on to the floor yesterday. She will be sent out in two or three days with the baby. The social-service worker could get her into a home, but she says she won't go and of course no one can make her. She says she's going to leave the baby somewhere—anywhere she can in the street on a dark night—and go home down state where she came from. She's had shame enough; she isn't going to carry it around with her any longer. No one has been able to touch her. It needs a strong hand to reach down and pull her up. It's a very special case. She's an educated girl. It's just the kind of case I'm sure you could deal with here successfully. She needs friends, real friends, and love, and all the things you both could give her."

"We would have to take her here to stay, in the house—she wouldn't harm the other babies, you think?" Ruth Anne was watching Barbara,

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had seen the story take hold of her, had seen her lips tighten and her eyes light up with steady intense interest,—“Barbara?”

“I suppose it’s our case, dear, since the doctor puts it so strongly. When does La Gioconda leave the hospital?”

“In two days.”

“Shall we send Miss Craig for her on Wednesday afternoon?”

Ruth Anne nodded.

“No, don’t. Can’t you go yourself, Mrs. Brewster? It will require a great deal of persuasion to get her here, I assure you—even you may fail—take Miss Craig by all means, but go yourself.” His voice took on the pleading accent that Ruth Anne remembered, flushing.

“I see that I am quite out of it,” pouted Ruth Anne; “of course anybody can see that Barbara is a more capable and persuasive person than I, but you might let me go along to see how she does it.”

“Then I will tell the chief nurse not to let her have her card until you come. Thank you so much. I am leaving the city to-day, so this is good-by and good luck.” He shook hands with Mrs. Brewster—they were all standing now.

“You are what?” echoed Ruth Anne. Barbara went back to her babies.

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"I am leaving; I came to say good-by, Barney."

"Where are you going?" she managed to bring out, her voice trembling.

"Canal Zone hospital at Ancon."

"For service there?"

"Yes; I got my appointment some time ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think it would make much difference to you, you've been so full of all this——"

"Oh, but I do care, my dear," she said softly, looking up into his face and smiling.

"Thank you." He took her hands. "It's very good of you to care, we've been such pals. I—I want to thank you. I had never known anybody like you, and for you to drop right down into my world rather turned my head, I guess, but I know you've forgiven me."

"You shan't say that, there's nothing in the world too good for you, you are the very best there is. I wish you would believe that I do love you a little and I'm very sorry I couldn't love you more, but—I couldn't. Does it hurt still? I suppose it does. I was bad, bad. But I didn't know any better, really I didn't."

"Don't, Barney, don't. It's all right, we—we're all learning—and I'm sure you will be happy with all this and the things it will bring you."

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"Thank you, dear, do fall in love and marry somebody right away. I want you to."

"All right, I'll try. Good-by, Barney." He wrung her hands, she kept tight hold of his and reached up and kissed his cheek, tenderly as she would kiss a child's.

She stood a long time at her window watching the corner where he had turned out of sight. She tried to keep them back but she could not, and two big tears fell and splashed on her hands. He had brought something wonderful and fine into her life. She wondered if she would ever have anything better, any more worth while than his love. It was not a very optimistic Ruth Anne, almost a sad one, who turned and went down to tell Miss Craig about their Leonardo mother and child coming on Thursday from the City Hospital.

She wondered what they would do with this Lisa—they would have to wait and see and go softly, since two lives and one soul were at stake. She had felt many times, in coming in contact with people at Bishop's House, an almost uncanny fear of the power vested in her and in the House; a power which was not her own, but was the power of righteousness going out and taking hold of people; righteousness it seemed had occult unknown unmeasured powers of its own, always seeking, always at work,—there was a

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fluid quality to this power that held her reverent and afraid. It seemed to fill all the empty places so that nothing evil could come in; it was almost a force growing and possessing itself of one stronghold after another. She was convinced the powers of evil were nowhere so mighty as those of good, such was the psychic effect of her work. At first she had been very modest in what she had hoped for Bishop's House, but as it had developed and grown she was almost breathless keeping pace with it, it so far exceeded her rosiest dream. And Barbara, Barbara could give and give and give again, to her heart's content, there were so many eager empty hands.

Lisa became a problem, the more she thought of her. She would have to give her to Barbara. That was what Webster had meant by a strong hand; it was Barbara's that would pull her up if any one could.

She went to sleep that night with a vision of Barbara, her face all hope and joy, reaching down her strong beautiful hands into some fearful dark place, seeking to save a soul, she who claimed none for herself.

XV

At the hour of the late morning when the three friends at Bishop's House were discussing the case of Lisa, the apartments of Rebecca Hayden at the Alexandria were still dark.

The actress was closing her season with a two weeks' engagement in "The Better Way," and had opened the previous evening to a friendly and appreciative audience. "The Better Way" was an ultra-modern play, showing quite as conspicuously the worse way, which reverse side the leading lady was occupied in portraying with increasing dramatic effect to the end of the five "parts."

Miss Hayden was an actress whose notable successes had been in parts of the woman with a past, and the shadier the past the more brilliant her interpretation.

Her maid Gretchen was moving about softly in the outer room, arranging flowers that had come to the stage dressing-room the night before, and opening other boxes which had just arrived from the hotel office with the morning's mail. Everything was in the charming disorder and confusion Miss Hayden loved: trunks open, trays resting on the arms of chairs, and gowns galore

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hanging on their backs, negligées, slippers, lingerie, and books flung about, filling the room with an air of profuse and careless luxury. The dressing-tables were piled high with silver and gold toilet things, jewel-cases, handkerchiefs, powder and rouge, with pins, buckles and puffs, hairpins and combs, photographs of men and women, illustrated magazines and papers. A simulated order among these belongings would come and go, more often the latter, greatly to the genuine distress of the thrifty middle-aged maid who could only clasp her hands and exclaim, *Ach Gott!* when a moment's rummaging of Rebecca's fair hands for a letter or telegram wrought new confusion.

There was a soft buzz at the muffled 'phone:

"Hello—it is Miss Hayden's maid—Miss Hayden is still sleeping. I will tell her, thank you— Yes, we are going to be in—we are unpacking. Good-by." She hung up the receiver quietly.

"Who's that you're talking to?" complained a good-natured sleepy voice, between yawns.

"Mrs. Brewster." Gretchen came into the room, smiling, in her black silk dress and embroidered apron. "Does Fräulein get up now?"

"Put up the curtains,—yes, I can't sleep any more. What time is it, what kind of day is it? Hot, isn't it? June is getting to be hell in this

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climate." She reached for a cigarette from the table at the head of her bed. Gretchen put up the shades and drew aside the hangings to admit the breeze.

"Where the devil—Gretchen!" She tossed the pillows about in tragic haste, finally drawing out a box of matches from the confusion she had made. She lighted the cigarette. Gretchen set up the pillows behind her and straightened the bed.

Miss Hayden did not speak again while she drew several puffs, swallowing the smoke. She shut the large silver box and set it back on the table.

"There, we feel better now—don't we, Gretchen dear? What is there this morning?"

Gretchen brought a tray of cards, letters and telegrams— "And Mrs. Brewster is coming at eleven."

"Barbara Brewster, the dear; you'd almost think she would like John to marry me, wouldn't you? Poor devil, I wonder how much he's making out of his assembly graft." She was humming in a high key, going through the cards and telegrams.

"Did Mrs. Hunt send a card last night—Mrs. William Hunt?"

"No; but Mr. Hunt sent the flowers, not Mr. William though, Mr. John."

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"Idiot, *dumkopf*! Of course not Mr. William," she mimicked the German accent drolly, "nor Justice Frederick, nor Mr. Alderman Henry. Heavens, the ramifications of that family! I don't dare to meet a Hunt anywhere in the U. S. A. or Ireland without being nice to him for fear he's a brother of John's." She lighted another cigarette.

"Telephone down for the coffee, please."

"Anything else, Miss Hayden?"

"What did we weigh yesterday, one hundred and twenty-two? Look at the calendar."

"One hundred and twenty-two and a half, but that was not the regular day for weighing Fräulein, and she had not had her swim," answered Gretchen in apology for the half pound.

Miss Hayden was counting up on her fingers, frowning:

"No, that's true, but I'd had a night on the sleeper and two long rehearsals with that beast Holcomb—isn't he a beast, Gretchen?—and it ought to have been less. Just the coffee, please. Why they had to run him in from Number Two company I can't see. He takes that whole scene in the third act and it's my scene. Well, we'll have to think up a way to fix him, there must be——" She smoked and read, grumbling, scowling, smiling, singing snatches of song until the tray came up.

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Rebecca Hayden was nearly thirty but she looked younger, sitting up in a pink wrapper, her black hair lying about her face in thick disordered curls and tied at the back with a big black bow. Her skin was thick and soft, a sort of cream-color, with a great deal of pink in her round, child-like cheeks. Her nose was responsible for her name, for it was not until after she had discovered the decided Jewish cast of her face that she had chosen the name of Rebecca in place of the Katy her Irish mother had given her. Her eyes were full and keen, clear gray blue with very heavy lids, brows, and lashes; her mouth was small and curved, full of responsive changes of expression, pouting, coaxing, and severe in rapid succession. Her jaw, the most striking feature of her face, was firm (almost hard) and gave her a splendid look of strength in her heavy scenes, for she was thin and small. Her hands were undeniably beautiful and she had an elaborate technique all her own for their exploitation; they cried, they laughed, they mocked,—when her face was still and masked she could move an audience to a hysteria of tears by holding their pose a psychological second while the little nerves and cords quivered and vibrated under the spot-light.

She leaned forward, head on one side, an admiring look in her eyes as they fell on the jar of flowers standing just outside her bedroom

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door and filling the room with their color and perfume.

"Which are Billy Gordon's—the beauties? Oh, he is so stupid, Gretchen, I nearly died of him last night. It's too bad,"—she shook her head, sighing sadly,—“and he has so much money too; made it in the tin business, or the iron business, or the rag business or some other dreadful business, I'm sure. Men with money are never nice, and nice men never have money, do they, Gretchen?” She was humming again and tossing her head as she tore some notes into little scraps and dropped them into the basket.

“*Mon dieu*, it's eleven. *Kommen sie hier mal, machs schnell*. We must make a little toilet for Madame Brewster. She must never tell my beloved John she found us like this, and here”—she thrust the cigarettes into the maid's hand—“hide those, put them in some unbelievable place, and take away these and this,” she indicated the ash tray, “and bring in a bunch of the roses, that will help. There's the buzzer.”

When Barbara came into the room a pink whirlwind met her, caught her, and kissed her, hung about her big shoulders, cooed to her, and cried and laughed all at once, stroked her cheek with caressing fingers, gave delighted little pats on her hands.

“Barbara Brewster! My, but it's good to see

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you. It's like seeing the sun on a cloudy day!"

"But, Becky, this doesn't look a cloudy day; it looks like a flower show."

"Doesn't it, the darlings? Everybody is so lovely to me—such a nice reception I had—it's nice to come back where people are so fond of you. They were like old friends, applauded all the old tricks they like. Yes it's always nice to come back," she repeated.

"Where was John last night; I missed him"—

"Not to the extent of not going out to supper, I hope?"

"Indeed not. Another old beau took me out, a nice dull old fat one. We had quite a gay time; funny he doesn't understand plays, his density is the most amusing thing, but after all he isn't so tiresome as those scintillatingly brilliant men that take the life out of you in an evening going them better. But where was John?"

"The session is not over. I suppose he's down there—he is about half the time. He'll be back in a day or two."

"I hope so. I shouldn't know what to do without John here. There are his roses, you see he didn't quite forget me." She swooped down and put her arms around a huge bunch of Killarneys. "Aren't they dears, all looking up at me with their beautiful faces! We Irish, you

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know, are so sentimental about flowers, they are just like people to us sometimes. He seems to like his politics, by the way,"—she was sitting on the floor swaying lazily, a half-open bud in her hand.

"He hopes to do a great deal later on. This is just his kindergarten, you know, and costs a great deal more than it's worth. Of course the only thing worth any thing in politics are the United States senatorships, and the boys don't get those."

"I suppose it takes a long time." Rebecca Hayden drew a long breath, clasped her hands on her knees and rocked back and forth, her lips parted dreamily.

"Becky, do you love John?"

Rebecca sat bolt upright, quickly dropping her little foot to the floor. Her expression changed from her foot-light mimicry to one of real seriousness, almost of pain, not a line of make-believe in it. Her lips closed and firm, she looked up steadily at Barbara, but did not answer.

"Do you love John?" she repeated. "Enough to marry him?" She finished.

"He hasn't asked me," she fenced, and Barbara waited.

"Why what's the matter, why do you want to know?" Rebecca hitched over nearer to Barbara and put her hand on her knee.

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"I think I might know, Becky," said Barbara, quietly looking down into the childish perplexed face flushing beneath her.

"I'm very fond of you, no one can be more devoted to the cause of your happiness, dear, and I think I might know,—it troubles me. I've always thought you two were meant for each other, but lately I don't know, and I want to know." Barbara's face was so grave, her tone so deeply tender and serious, Becky turned pale; she was faint at heart, she caught a long breath and answered:

"I suppose you've a right to know, no one else ever could have so much authority over me as you have. You have done so much for me. How I remember"—her voice was low and rich with a pathetic appeal in it, she was twisting a big jewelled ring on Barbara's finger while she clung to her hand:

"—I had been doing stock and one-night stands till I was nearly dead and saved two hundred dollars, God knows how, starving, scrimping, freezing. I was sick of it all and ran away to Paris and you found me without a penny, without breakfast or dinner or a bed—*sans* everything—and took me home with you." She was silent a moment, then went on.

"I wonder"—she shuddered and leaned against her, drooping her head—"I wonder what would have happened to me without you,

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it's too horrible to think of. I wish I could repay you for all you've done for me," she ended.

"You do, with your love."

"Love is everything, isn't it? And you'll think it foolish, but I pray for you every night, I pray you may have everything you want,—love and happiness, whatever it is you want,—sometimes I wonder if you have everything, and think perhaps you wouldn't be so strong and splendid, that it's some sorrow or some want buried ever so deeply, hidden ever so safely, that makes it possible for you to be the heavenly comfort you are to everybody." She laughed. "If you weren't so much older than John I'd be jealous, he admires you so," she finished lightly.

"Then you do love him?" Barbara pursued.

"I love him; I hope he will ask me to marry him. I'm afraid he won't sometimes, last year even when I was here he was different; I thought it was politics, found a thousand excuses for him. But before, he had always jested about marrying when he was governor or something of the sort, and he never said a word about it, though we had beautiful times, suppers and motoring. I don't know what made me feel a difference,—perhaps he didn't want to kiss me as often,—and then Christmas he sent me that big sapphire and I was happy again. And now—there *was* a time when he came a thousand miles for

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opening night to give me a hand the second I so much as poked my nose out. He might have come up for last night, it seems to me——” she was wistfully questioning.

“I don’t know, dear, I haven’t seen him for several days; he’s sure to come over as soon as he comes back, only I do want to be sure that you still love him, that you want him, that there’s no one else.”

Rebecca got up with a little laugh; she was almost herself again.

“A hundred others, Barbara dear, they’re in every town, but no *one* else, never will be.” She began a feverish hunt for a cigarette.

“Gretchen, where’s my cigarette case? I’m sure Mrs. Brewster will have one; where do you put them? I haven’t seen them since we unpacked. Did you leave them at the theatre? We smoke in the first act as usual,” Rebecca laughed; “people who come to see me would feel cheated if I didn’t.”

“No wonder, you do it so well.”

“Practice makes perfect!”

Barbara watched Rebecca’s fingers cling to the cigarette, the eager satisfaction overspread her face with the first whiff.

“You *do* do it so well. Don’t you smoke a great deal more than you used to?”

“Oh, yes, but it doesn’t hurt me.”

Barbara shook her head.

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"I don't care, it's all I can do. I can't eat, I get fat. I can't drink, it spoils my looks. I can't go out to parties, playing eight performances a week. I can't even have lovers—I've got to keep straight for John. I can't do anything but work, work, work. I will smoke if I want! It doesn't hurt me, the doctor said it didn't. John knows I smoke; he doesn't care."

"Does he know how much you smoke?"

"He doesn't have to. I don't believe in a man knowing everything. Does he tell me how much he drinks or plays? Of course not, no man does. The less a man knows the better for him."

"That sounds like a line from 'The Better Way,'" said Barbara.

"Doesn't it?" she laughed. "It seems to me we are very serious this morning; come, let us be foolish."

"I must go now, Becky; come out Thursday afternoon to the house and have tea won't you? You know I'm helping a little friend of mine to run a neighborhood house, and it's such fun. Come out and see the babies."

"I'd love to."

"Thursday then. Good-by."

"Barbara dear, I love you, good-by," she called down the corridor. "Come in soon after we unpack and I'll put on all my new hats for you."

RUTH ANNE

"You see you are the first actress I've ever met. Are you all so wonderful?"

"They are adorable, all of them, aren't you, Rebecca?" The tray had come in and John was handing cups and cakes.

They began a discussion of the play, Rebecca with as spontaneous enthusiasm as though she had not played it for a year and was bored to death with the mention of it.

"But," persisted Ruth Anne, "I don't see how you play such parts; you are so lovely and perfectly womanly and good; I don't see how you *know*."

"How to play the courtesan? it's like playing anything else. Though some actresses can't do it and make it seem real, I admit. You are always conscious of the good woman playing a part. But I, you see, some way I *am* the courtesan, it's an inspired thing, it takes possession of you, I give up to the spirit of evil,—I *know* I'm doing it well."

"Miss Hayden, don't say that. It makes me feel as though it would hurt you sometime, that spirit of evil; it must be powerful to fill your imagination——"

"No, you child, don't bother about it, there's something in the magic of the artistic temperament that saves us, isn't there, John?"

"It isn't the blessed A. T. at all, Miss Bar-

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nard, it's in her own good heart. She's fooling you."

There was stir in the hall. John went out at once,—he had been waiting, praying for Barbara every minute since Rebecca had come, she would take the bull by the horns. Miss Craig passed through the hall and on up the stairs with a small baby in her arms, a dark-browed scowling young woman followed reluctantly.

"For God's sake, Barb, why didn't you tell me she was coming?" Hunt whispered hoarsely. "Come on in and have some tea; Rebecca is here," he finished.

Barbara took in the difficult situation with one amused glance. Poor John, disturbed and uncomfortable, Rebecca angry at John, puzzled with her hostess, while Ruth Anne apparently quite unconscious of the *impassé* was imperturbably dispensing tea. She graciously swept in and bestowed on Rebecca a generous embrace, gave her cheek to John, took a cup of tea from Ruth Anne.

"I couldn't help it, Becky darling," she kissed her again; "That's for being late, so terrible not to be here."

"Never mind. I have been most divertingly entertained, talking shop, all of us. I didn't know John had gone in for philanthropy, I understood he was in politics."

RUTH ANNE

"Oh, it's the same thing. John, send away Becky's taxi, you can take her home in the motor—tell the chauffeur. Eating up the poor child's money at that rate"—John went out, thanking God for Barbara.

"Did Ruth Anne tell you, we went to get this woman and her baby from the charity hospital? It took hours to persuade her to come and then a lot of red tape about her card. And it was so hot and I knew I should miss some of your visit, so you see it's been awful." She took off her gloves and hat.

"Was that the woman who followed on upstairs? She looked so dark and strange and angry, quite as though she'd murder you all in your beds,"—she shrugged her shoulders and shook her head,—“poor woman, she must have a terrible tragedy in her heart; she could easily be *Hortense* with that look. What are you going to do with her?”

Ruth Anne went up to see the new baby.

"We don't know; she's an experiment, like many of the things we are trying."

"What *are* you trying to do anyway?"

"To tell the truth, I think we're trying to make ourselves happy. We like to believe it's more than that, but I'm afraid it isn't."

"I thought you were always happy?"

"Yes, passively. What I want is active happi-

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ness, something that is alive and renews itself day by day out of its own usefulness, its inner worthiness."

"What queer things we do to be happy!" Becky was looking out of the window. "So you are living in a slum, Barbara Brewster. It's like putting the Venus de Milo out in the coal-yard."

"We saw you play last night. John came up in time to take us."

"But not in time to see me," Rebecca laughed. "Don't, Barbara, dear, it isn't necessary after—after what you said yesterday. She's pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's pretty, do you think that's it?"

"Don't you?" Rebecca's sad eyes were fixed on Barbara, she was drumming with her gloved fingers on the window-pane.

"Yes, I do, and yet I've known John a long time, since he was a little boy, and I can't believe he'd give you up after all these years. He goes after what he wants and he gets it and I know he wants you. That is the way I feel about it; this is a time we must tide over, tactfully, and see if it doesn't come out right."

"Does she care?"

"That I can't tell you, Becky."

"I was prepared for something, but I didn't know what until I came in to-day and saw them together. Has she money?"

RUTH ANNE

"Very little. It isn't money. Don't think him so bad as that."

"Oh, I don't think John bad, but I know the things that tempt men."

"Yes, Becky, you do; there isn't much you children of the stage don't learn."

"Do you love me more than John?"

"Yes, because you're a woman. Women need love more; men have other things."

"Then I can count on you, dear, if you see a chance to help?"

"If I see a chance to help, I will do what I think right, Becky." Barbara was gravely regarding Rebecca, who presently answered.

"I'll see what I can do—perhaps it isn't too late."

"Come now and see the babies."

They joined Ruth Anne and the nurse on the porch and devoted themselves to the babies for a half hour as though neither had another thought or care in the world.

John came into the office where Miss Craig had resumed her desk.

"What do you do, Miss Craig, when you get into a devil of a fix?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say, what do you do when you get into a devil of a fix?"

RUTH ANNE

She looked at him a moment inclined to smile and then thought better of it.

"I don't," she said.

"But if you did?" he insisted.

"I'm sure if I were as clever as you I could get out of it."

"Go to the head of the class. I say, are you thinking of going in for diplomacy?"

She shook her head.

"But after all, just the same I don't see my way out."

"I'm sorry. Perhaps I'd ask Mrs. Brewster."

"Wrong this time. You see, Miss Craig, I fear she's engaged for the prosecution. Why don't you recommend Miss Barnard now?"

"She's too absorbed in problems *as* problems to help any body solve them. She just revels in unusual predicaments."

"Does she now? What a pleasant time she must be having this P.M., if she sees it. Is she quick to see them, Miss Craig?"

"Yes, but she doesn't let you know it, it interests her so deeply that it doesn't ruffle the surface."

"The devil! Say, Miss Craig, where did you get your degree?"

"I've several, but being born Scotch is better than any of them."

The three women were coming downstairs,

RUTH ANNE

Miss Hayden was taking leave in a gush of enthusiasm over the babies. John stood waiting on the steps, nodded good-by to Barbara and Ruth Anne, and gaily accompanied Miss Hayden to the car. He still could not see his way out of his fix as he gave the chauffeur his directions and climbed into the limousine. Rebecca chattered and laughed, waved a last salute with her parasol while John bowed and they were off.

The children in the playground climbing on the fence watched the gay pretty lady and the big man in the great black car as it glided away.

XVII

IN the moment of pause which ensued, a mere breath-taking for the coming struggle, Rebecca sought desperately for a weapon. One thing after another suggested itself rapidly and was immediately dismissed as useless by her alert mind; she closed her eyes and forced her consciousness deep down into strata unplumbed except in desperate need. Into the infinite variety of her resources she delved, brought up tragic love-scenes, declarations, accusations, serio-comic passages from light plays, with all their business and properties. A scene was rising, taking form, assuming definite outlines, taking on accretions of strength, increasing in power as she dwelt upon it, until it seemed the thing she sought. She turned it over swiftly, she decked it out fantastically with brilliant colored rags of passion brought to light from crypt-like recesses of her brain. It was a shabby threadbare trick, but perhaps it would serve; he liked her changing passionate moods, her taunting fickle moments.

She opened her eyes; it seemed an age since she had leaned back in the corner defenceless. John sat grimly looking ahead, his arms folded.

RUTH ANNE

She let him wait a minute, then her tone of smooth detachment startled him.

"I'm so glad Barbara sent you home with me, dear, I've wanted to see you ever since I came to town." It wasn't easy to begin with such short shrift of preparation, and the mazarine of her eyes deepened with the effort, while the rest of her countenance had the simplicity of a May morn. After all, she was not one of the most accomplished actresses of the day for nothing.

"I suppose so," he lifted his chin and scowled.

It was like playing a lead on an hour's notice, every speech depending on the cue she chanced to get and her wits.

"In fact, I intended to see you at once and tell you, but you were out of town," she went on apologetically.

"Well, what?" he demanded turning from his contemplation of the blurred view ahead.

"I've made up my mind to get married,"—she flashed a glance at him as she gave him this, to get her next line. She saw him turning white around the lips before he spoke, the line of his jaw became harder, he still stared ahead fixedly.

"The hell you have!"

She laughed, tapping his arm.

"Oh, it's time I settled down, John—I'm twenty-eight and not a penny in the world. That won't do for Rebecca," distractingly pouting her

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lips and swaying deliciously near him with the movement of the car.

"Of all mercenary devils! Who is it?"

The mercenary devil leaned forward on her parasol, its heavy silk rustled against his trouser-leg irritatingly; if she wasn't so damnably near, it would be easier to talk sense to her; this propinquity business was no joke.

"We won't announce it until autumn for professional reasons; besides, I haven't told him yet. I'm going to send him a wire to-night. He's sailing on the *Morania* with me on the fifth," complacently.

John turned around, throwing one arm on to the back of the seat and bracing himself with the other as he leaned toward her.

"Look here, Becky, I thought you were going to marry me."

"Did you now?" she exclaimed in the soft Irish voice that drove audiences to mad applause over her love-scenes.

"You know I love you."

Rebecca leaned her head back against his arm on the cushion, snuggling the nape of her neck into his elbow and sighing softly.

"I used to think you did," she said dreamily, tapping the toe of her shoe on his instep.

"I've always loved you, from the minute your little foot touched the stage the first night I saw

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you. Hang it, I know it's been a long time to wait, but——"

Rebecca sighed and yawned.

"Waiting is very stupid, and never a real serious word about getting married,—how could I know you meant to ask me at all?"

"Come, Becky, let's play the game straight," he pleaded, tired of her wheedling and teasing and less sure of himself after each encounter.

"Which means you haven't so far," she returned.

"Have you?"

"All the time, John." Her firm tense tone disconcerted him again.

"The devil!"

"You *know* I have," she insisted passionately. "Have you?" she asked again, following up the Socratic method.

"Don't ask a man such a fool question," he growled stubbornly.

"Which means you haven't," she still pursued.

"You know the world; I don't pretend to live an emasculate existence."

Rebecca was shocked, she hastened to say,

"Oh, I don't mean that. I'm meaning now,"—dropping deliciously into the Irish idiom—"the little lady at the settlement." There was a demure tone of amused accusation as she made her *coup d'état*.

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John drew his arm away and squared about.
"You will leave her out of it, please."

Rebecca hardened within herself, but kept her soft inquisitive tone:

"Why, how can we, isn't she——" she hesitated.

"We are very good friends, that's all; like friends you have——"

She interrupted:

"Like the one I'm going to marry, perhaps," amusedly.

"And be damned to him!"

"John, John, I'm afraid philanthropy is worse for your English than politics,"—she was plainly laughing at him now,—“but to go back to your little lady, if you will pardon me, I'm afraid we'll have to talk about her. I suppose you are going to marry her and I'm very glad, it's time you settled down too. She's beautiful and seems to have all the social graces. She'll be a great help in your career.” She spoke with evident satisfaction.

"You know, Becky, you are more to me than any career. But I have to make my place in the world—you'd hate me if I didn't. I can't marry now, the old man wouldn't stand for it."

"I suppose the lady will wait," she went on speculatively; "You see, John, I know I never would do; your family don't want me. You can't

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get anywhere without their help; and by the time you're independent of them, why I'd be down and out, playing one-night stands again. A few years and it's all over with us, unless the very greatest, which I am not; I have to marry while I can, and you must marry to the best advantage too, that's obvious. It's just as well to be reasonable about these things. Miss Barnard will adorn any station you may rise to, and this philanthropy business is a great graft now." She shrewdly turned him all inside out for his own leisurely inspection.

"Becky, it's monstrous, it's disgusting, discussing this thing with you, and you are so cold-blooded about it too! I didn't think you had it in you, I don't believe you care." There was a note of being wronged as well as of anger in his voice.

"We've had some good times together," she went on reminiscently; "they'll have to end now. It is too bad," resignedly, "but—well—I care enough to want you to do what's best for you. It takes more love to give a man up sometimes than to keep him." She was beginning her climax now, so long delayed.

"But, Becky! Darling, do you care so much? I'm never sure of you, how much you care——" He gave her the cue at last for the speech which

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had been forming and maturing in the back of her head, as she led him on.

"I care so much that— Oh, John, I don't want to marry anybody else, I want you." She was white and trembling with listening to something that appalled her ears; she was acting a part that was terribly real. She put one little hand on his knee and the contact brought a sudden vivid color to her face.

"Rebecca!" He reached out toward her.

"Wait," she said in a still voice, "you don't seem to know at all what love is. I've tried to tell you from behind the foot-lights in a hundred rôles I've played just to you, when I knew you were in the fourth row. I've tried to show you what a woman gives when she gives her love. Love is understanding, forgiveness, hope, faith, everything. The last thing a woman gives is the least; what is a woman's body when she has given her soul"—she finished hoarsely.

"Rebecca, you don't mean——" He stopped, saw she was laughing, and a wave of rage swept over him; she was fooling him again.

"Becky—you devil!" The car stopped before the Alexandria, he wrenched the door open and jumped out, leaving her to get down unassisted; he heard her laugh still following him down the boulevard.

XVIII

JULY was a terrible month. Everyone at Bishop's House was worn out with the heat and the heavy demands made on the settlement. Women with fretting babies, or worse still babies quiet and listless, came and went; it was useless to pass these cases on to infant welfare commissions and bureaus of charity; crèches, nurseries and hospitals, every department of social service was overtaxed, referring them on meant delay, and delay as surely meant death.

The West End was far removed from the bay, shut away by thick blocks of factories radiating heat like ovens. Heat waves dust-laden danced and vibrated dizzily over the melting asphalt.

Again and again on the days which dragged on endlessly with the temperature above ninety, Ruth Anne wondered how long the good God would let it last, this blinding suffocating glare of heat; she was sure there was not a well baby in the whole West End. Dr. Mahoney came in exhausted from long hours' work and went out again into the burning streets to hunt out in alleys and over stables and in vile-smelling basements the addresses scrawled on dirty scraps of paper and left at the door of the neighborhood house.

RUTH ANNE

A stout woman went slowly, a little unsteadily, up the walk and into Bishop's House. Ruth Anne and Miss Craig were in the office, where half a dozen women and children were waiting. The room was stifling with the odors they brought in with them, and Ruth Anne felt sick and faint as she helped Miss Craig finish off the morning's supplicants. This last comer she did not feel equal to, it would mean another long story, while Miss Craig made the record in short-hand and then for one of them, an investigation immediately if it was an urgent case.

She looked at the woman, who had a beautiful face, large brown eyes with heavy circles under them as from many sleepless nights. Her clothing was mussed and damp, and from under a bedraggled cape grimy coarse hands fumbled with her skirt. She looked the kind of a woman who would appeal to Barbara, there was something so touching and tragic about her beautiful face.

Ruth Anne sent Barbara down, taking her work in the nursery and helping to finish the morning toilets of the bottle babies, then went into her room to shut out the moaning cries and little heart-breaking wails that seemed to fill the house.

Barbara came in with hat and parasol.

"I'm going with her; she says the rain last night filled their basement with a foot of water. The children are all marooned on the beds, the

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baby is sick, her own feet are soaking wet. She wants a place to go: she says one room will do until it's dry again. They've only bread to eat and not a penny."

"Take Miss Craig with you, I can manage here."

"No, it isn't far, I'll be back soon."

She put some bank-notes into her purse and went out. Miss Craig watched her down the street, her splendid tall figure in white towering over the woman in slovenly black with the wonderfully beautiful face, and then went on writing up the case.

Ruth Anne read over her shoulder—

"Mrs. Alvina Mundt—baby sick—visiting nurse. Applied to Trinity Church—no assistance rendered . . ."

"I wonder why they didn't help them?"

"Some good reason," declared Miss Craig; "I tried to get the visiting nurse before Mrs. Brewster left, but she is on her rounds, and Dean Bently was not at the Parish House. There was nothing to do but go; I wish I had gone."

"Yes, it's terribly hot for Mrs. Brewster."

"It isn't that. I'm afraid they'll take her in, some way."

"Take in Mrs. Brewster? You don't know her, she's terribly clever."

"Yes, but she hasn't spent three years with these people as I have. Her heart is so easily

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touched. I watched her—she melted the minute she saw the woman. She spoke like a lady too.”

“Yes, but it was her face; anyone would believe her. She must have been a perfectly stunning beauty once.”

Miss Craig turned to Ruth Anne:

“Have you seen Lisa this morning?”

“Yes, she’s washing bottles and hating everybody as usual, and hers the only well baby in the house. She seems to resent it. She”—Ruth Anne laughed—“she digs down into her misery and brings it up in great dripping handfuls and smears it all over herself, so as not to forget about it. She’s always absorbed in her dreams—dreams of wrath and vengeance under that wicked smile which flutters in her eyes and around her lips.”

Barbara telephoned at noon that she would not be home until late in the afternoon. She was having a glass of milk at the drug store; she was all right, it wasn’t any hotter in K street than in Bishop’s Place. The Mundts were taking a good deal of time to straighten out.

Miss Craig scowled, as she emphatically hung up the receiver.

Ruth Anne went upstairs and took the babies for an hour while the nurse went to lie down with an ice cap. She was worried about Barbara; she was not used to the heat of the streets and she had now been out for hours. She kept getting

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up and going to the window, watching the street in her anxiety. The children were splashing and wading in the fishes' fountain down in the garden; outside the hydrant was running a stream down the hot dusty street and a hundred gamins from K street, almost naked, were playing noisily in the gutter, carrying pails of water and pouring it over each other. Down at the corner a horse had fallen in the sun and his fly-infested carcass obstructed the narrow street. She had telephoned several times to have it removed, but that department too was overworked. In a fashionable residence block where scarcely fifty people lived the beast would have been removed by automobile ambulance in an hour, while here with a thousand to the block it could lie for a day festering in the sun. Ruth Anne's heart was full of bitterness to-day, bitterness at injustice, neglect, needless torturing of women and children; she could not see the great plan,—it was all dark, obscured by the close press of the day's misery.

Exhausted mothers were coming now to take their babies home for the night; two very sick ones, scarcely breathing, were to stay,—they would not survive the night over there among the low roofs in the breathless blackness.

Presently Barbara came up the walk, tired and white, and quite beyond speech.

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While they were putting her to bed, filling ice bags, calling frantically over the 'phone for Dr. Mahoney, Ruth Anne regarded ruefully as she bathed them Barbara's hands, clouded and grimy and water-soaked, scratched like a scrub-woman's; her linen dress too was drabbed with mud and water, black and disreputable. What a beautiful time she must have had! Miss Craig interrupted her here to say that Dr. Mahoney could not be found and should she telephone some one else.

"Who is your doctor, dear?"

"I don't have one."

"Well, you're going to have one right now."

"Very well then, call Dr. Hollander."

Miss Craig went to the telephone again, and Ruth Anne, filled now with a new fear, sat beside the bed silent. She would have to see him of course, to face him before Barbara as though nothing had happened.

It would be very difficult but it must be managed, she must not be conscious of herself, must think only of Barbara, take his orders and obey them. After all, he wouldn't dare be very disagreeable to her; she would treat him like a stranger, give him no opportunity to rebuke her. Her courage came back to her until she heard his step and his voice below and then she was a coward again, white and terror-stricken, rising to meet him.

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and what part they were forming of her ultimate plan.

In his first visit he was barely conscious of her, absorbed in his patient,—curt, brusque, entirely formal and impersonal in his impressive and very high-priced professional look and tone. He came the next afternoon, when Barbara was much better except for her splitting head, and went up alone to see her, staying an hour and visiting in a friendly way that Ruth Anne envied. She could hear his low laugh from time to time. She had not given Barbara's illness a serious thought from the moment he came into the house, so assured was she of his caring for her wisely and well. With all of her resentment and fear of him she had a great trust and confidence, a feeling of rest when he was in the house, of reassurance in his step; she was conscious too of a full happy feeling in her heart when she heard his voice, an almost drunken sense of his proximity but still allied to breathless fear.

As she had shut herself away with her hurt and pain and analyzed every shred and tatter of feeling and desire after his denunciation, so now she turned intensively with the rankling of the same hurt, to weighing, measuring, classifying everything she found in the stream of her conscious life, that crystallized and matured into action, everything that had become a disappoint-

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ment and a regret; and as she lifted her eyes from these things she caught, far on, a fleeting glimpse of the future—the things she really wanted, the things she hoped for, the wonderful visionary things she could feel were coming to her. She tested their worth with a finer and more discriminating method, and up to a higher standard than she would have found possible without the stimulus of Hollander's nearness to her.

In her perception of her new values of these things, the use and purpose of the new impulses he had set into motion by his damning criticism, she saw also her narrowness, her childish littleness in holding against him the rancor and bitterness that had welled up within her when he came to the house. She put it out of her mind as unworthy. She could see cause for the most boundless gratitude to him. As she saw it now, the wonderful thing was, that he had cared enough at all to take the pains to tell her.

She did not know what he and Barbara had talked of. She thought it might have been the neighborhood house and its work. Perhaps when he learned she was genuinely working, his contempt for her would change to a feeling at least of hopefulness that at last her feet were to find the path he had traced for them in their earlier talk; the delights of that talk, his earnestness,

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almost tenderness, they were a joy she hugged to her still.

He had come down the stairs and into the office where she had gone so that he need not see her unless he wished, and offering his hand in his high gallant way had said that Mrs. Brewster would be quite all right now if she exercised care for a few days, and that she was fortunate in having so good a nurse. There was no note of jest or lightness in his tone which was almost kind, and she felt a little yielding in his professional manner, a softening of his arrogant aloofness in the almost friendly ease with which he bowed himself out and the nod with which he answered the uplift of her eyes as he did so.

Well, if he was going to reinstate her into his favor, anything was worth while. She would as lief have her pride in her pocket as anywhere else if the price of putting it there was his friendship. To be in his favor was the highest pitch of her ambition; there was nothing she would not have courage to do, no perseverance too irksome, no patience too tiresome, no struggle too great if she could hope for his recognition. A place in his friendly tolerance even, meant not to live utterly in the outer darkness.

Yet always present was the fear, a breathless turmoil when she thought of him, when she spoke of him, a fear clutching her heart when he an-

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swered—something that took her breath in the night as she conjured up his dark grim face. It was a fear of the power in him, his might as a moral force, the strength of his grim asceticism which was like a rock to beat against until one fell with bruised and torn hands.

She would have to discriminate now, more carefully than before, since she had held out to her this reward. No unworthy thing, nothing less high than *his* standards must come into her life, everything must measure up to him. She must go carefully and keep her feet in the path.

XX

BARBARA'S three days in bed and Ruth Anne's reëncounter with Dr. Hollander were not all the sequelæ there were to be of the Mundt case.

John and Edith had come over anxiously to enquire after Barbara's indisposition, and were drinking tea while discussing the election of the Hunts' senator when Dean Bently was announced.

The dean was at once their very near neighbor—Trinity spire was in sight of their door-yard—and the most distinguished social worker in the community, a recognized authority wherever people were engaged in work socio-religious.

The dean was a trifle taller than Barbara, and lean and angular as churchmen should be ideally, while Barbara in her austere white dress seemed like some royal abbess receiving some priestly deputy; his attitude toward her was like that of a spiritual adviser to a daughter of the faith, and in her large and generous welcome there was something delicately suggestive of his superiority in their joint sphere of endeavor.

His conspicuous directing of his conversation to Mrs. Brewster at once brought about a division of the party, and Barbara was quick to suspect

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that some special mission had brought him to Bishop's House, other than that of merely paying his respects to a new organization. The dean, with all his suavity and diplomacy of approach, yet was direct in coming to his point.

"It is desirable from the standpoint of all the interests involved, those purely economic as well as those which are our special province, that a basis of harmonious coöperation between us should be established, to the end that our endeavors do not overlap and so frustrate just the result we have all of us so much at heart; namely, not only the relieving of present emergencies, but aiming so to work that an ultimate better economic and moral condition shall follow in the train of our labors.

"I had a special instance in mind, as I see you are ready to divine, in coming to you to-day, in addition to the very great pleasure of meeting Miss Barnard and yourself."

Barbara thanked God, if there was a God, just then that Miss Craig was out investigating and not within ear-shot of the dean. She had done some terrible thing, it was evident. The dean went on, his impressive sonorous phrases filling her with both concern and amusement. She who loathed sermons, to have one individually preached to her by the dean of Trinity,—it was delicious.

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"The case in point is that of the Mundts." The dean settled back in his large willow chair comfortably, held the fingertips of his long lean hands together meditatively as he started the recital of the history of this most unregenerate and misguided family. He began it with decided relish, with a twitching of the lips which often betrays a very much amused *raconteur* giving one a specially fine story.

"The Mundts came into this parish with their six children two years ago. They were soon found to be destitute, the father out of work and spending for drink the money the mother earned by washing; that is, all that Mrs. Mundt did not herself spend for drink. Mrs. Mundt is as confirmed in her alcoholism as her husband. The children were hungry, the rent unpaid, there was no furniture, they were sleeping on heaps of rags on the floor.

"We took the family to the Juvenile Court, secured a city workshop sentence for John Mundt, put the six children into our own girls' and boys' homes and sent Mrs. Mundt to the hospital,—the baby now almost a year old was born there. When Mundt came out of the workshop, we found employment for him. They had supplies of coal and food from the county agency and still all were hungry, naked, and wretched. They sold the furniture our guild had bought

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for them, and almost none of the money the father earned found its way home.

“ Since everyone who had had anything to do with them was convinced that the only salvation for these seven children lay in separating them from their parents, our whole endeavor was directed now to that end. We knew they had very little food, that all but the two older children were naked of clothing, that their basement had the bare ground for floor, that the baby was sick and would have died but for the visiting nurse, the father and mother both drinking. We *had* to allow these conditions to obtain in order to bring to the judge sufficient evidence of neglect and incompetency. We *could* have housed them, clothed them, fed them, but to what purpose? Only to prolong the misery and degradation of the children and the pauperization of the adults.

“ Investigators had reported conditions to the court; it only remained for officials to verify the report in person. The morning of the last of those hot days last week was chosen for the visit. Remember, this was the culmination of months of conscientious and prayerful labor on the part of Trinity society for the regeneration and salvation of that family; the end was in sight. When they came to that sodden filthy basement it was empty. A Mrs. Brewster from Bishop’s House—with an enthusiasm and heroism worthy of a

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better cause—had chosen, on a day when eleven men dropped dead of heat prostration in the streets, to rent a tenement, to furnish and transport to it this naked hungry family, filling their larder and their ice-box and clothing them. A more prosperous-looking and comfortable family could not be found in all K street than the Mundts when the probation officer trailed them to their new home.”

He waited for the full sense of her infamous conduct to sink well into her consciousness.

“Thus you see the work of months was all undone, our purposes defeated. We shall have to begin again. Meanwhile the children must live in that sordid, drunken, begging atmosphere until the furniture is sold and they are turned out again into the street. You have delayed the cause of justice, impeded the progress of seven defenceless children toward decent and proper life.”

“So I should have left them in that swimming-hole?” Barbara questioned.

“The point I am making, Mrs. Brewster, is this: if you had known the case was being taken care of, you would not of course have interfered. That is what I came to demonstrate to you, the need of coöperation between our organizations. I remember it was stated that Bishop’s House would work independently of organized charities. The unwisdom of that position is what I am here

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to urge upon you. We are ready to help at any time. There isn't a family in this whole city which has ever applied for assistance at any of the associated or allied charities which has not its *dossier* complete to date, filed and ready for reference at any time. This information is always at your disposal."

Barbara was very humble.

"As a matter of fact, my dear Dean, we do try to do things according to the recognized methods; but this seemed a special emergency, the flooded basement and all, and—I just couldn't resist the woman's appeal. Do you think . . . your good God would mind my giving them another chance?"

"My good God, Mrs. Brewster! Say rather, our good God."

"Well?"

The dean frowned. There was no keeping a woman to the point.

"Perhaps not. It all depends on whether it's the right chance. I'm afraid we're going to differ," he said perplexed.

Barbara rose. "I am sure we are most grateful for your interest in us, Dean Bently. It was very good of you to come, and we *will* come to you when we need advice— Yes—do come again."

The dean took his dignified leave of them all, and Barbara, still a bit white from her illness

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and the dean, dropped into a chair. It was no joke interfering with the red tape of social organizations, she was beginning to learn.

Edith and the other Hunts were leaving next day for Devil's Gap. John was coming up in a day or two; he would be in later to say good-by.

After the others were gone, the two women sat talking. Barbara told Ruth Anne the dean's story, not with the amusement with which she had had it from the dean, but sadly, her eyes sorrowful and intense.

"I saw it in her face the moment I came into the hall, and while she was telling her story it all came to me in a flash, it was like a blow—her poverty, her weakness, her wretchedness, the drink, her despair, her struggle, the realization that a crisis was reached. Her need was so tragic it clutched me. I saw all their degradation, their lost condition before I stood in that flooded cellar, but I took the chance. I try to think sometimes there is a God, a Providence directing all things, some supreme desire or purpose that makes sport of all our miserable empirical wisdom, our human experience and judgments. I wanted to think that she had been sent to me, just to me, for me to have the blessedness of working out their problem.

"If I could stand her firmly on her feet, give her a moment to look about and catch her breath, she might take courage. Something, the good

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somewhere latent, the primitive force of her being might take command of her, direct her, give her to see a short step of her way in clear clean daylight before her.

“ I wanted her to feel our love going out to her in our service. I took her with me to the new tenement, I worked with my hands—with her—washing furniture, scrubbing floors, bathing and dressing the children, all the lowly things of toil to which my hands were unaccustomed. I wanted her to feel how love levels us all, makes us truly sisters in our sorrow and misfortunes, to give her the assurance that our help is ever there, our hands ready; that there is no end to our love for them and our faith in them. I let her know that I knew their besetting sins and weakness, but that we with the strength of our bodies, of our minds, the love of our hearts, were ready to stand back of her, to hold her until her feet were firm.

“ If I gave her only one glimpse of all that I felt, all that I wanted, while I was scrubbing that floor, bathing the thin hot little bodies of her children, it is quite enough. We can none of us see the end of the path, we must work and live to-day, to-day, and to-day. No matter if they go back to all their misery, which the dean says they will, I have given them one more chance.

“ She made me feel unworthy of my high place of wealth and comfort and cleanness and safety.

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I saw the child-births and the pains,—she had given seven children to the world, while I had none; she had had gifts, revelations, and ecstasies that I had never known: the feel of the babe at her breast, the sound of his first cry. I had not fulfilled woman's high destiny, I had fallen short of that great honor and blessing of motherhood, and this sodden creature—her brain benumbed by drink, mumbling broken phrases of mendicancy—she was a mother, she had brought beautiful rosy, laughing, crying, loving, human beings into the world, and I had my empty hands, my barren life.

“I didn't know what other people had done for her, I didn't care; I wanted to try, to have my chance to do something to save that beautiful mother of children, I wanted to pit myself against the powers of darkness dragging her down. It was as though I would refuse my hand to a drowning man because others had tried to pull him out and failed. I must have known that others had tried and failed, perhaps were trying still, but some eddy of the current had driven her my way and it was my turn to help.”

Ruth Anne's face was white and tense with feeling as Barbara's passionate vibrant tones ceased.

“You flagellant!” cried Ruth Anne. “You, an unbelieving pagan!”

XXI

RUTH ANNE was waiting for two things, one of which was for John to finish his broken-off sentence—that somewhat epoch-making sentence he was engaged upon when interrupted by Rebecca Hayden's advent. John's attitude of big brother in the house had been most delightful; his little car made frequent trips to the K street slum and many long waits in their driveway, between bills and balloting the two last months of the late session, and his visits were the delight of the household, from Miss Craig to the tiniest babe who loved to be tossed and played with. They had motored together, sometimes with Barbara in her big car, more often alone the long hot summer evenings, until the midnight coolness came to the still avenues and driveways. She had been waiting for a long time for just some such thing to penetrate the very thin ice they were skating upon and she was disturbed at the delay. Women's lives were spent in waiting, waiting for one man or another, as men's were in waiting for opportunities, when they were not strong enough to make them. He couldn't possibly ignore that their situation demanded something of him; he had been occupied with business, important excit-

RUTH ANNE

ing things that absorbed him. When he had said that he would drop in later to say good-by, she was sure it was she alone he would be coming to see, and that good-by was the other thing she was waiting for.

But the week went on to its end and she began to think he had changed his mind, or was not sure of his mind yet, and dared not see her. She could not talk about it to Barbara, who was always singularly noncommittal where John was concerned, whether it was loyalty or lack of interest she could not tell; she was alike indifferent to his efforts in behalf of the much needed playground and to the newspaper clamor over the Hunts' purchase of a senator. Barbara was irritatingly possessed of a calm that no outer enthusiasms or disturbances could stir. Ruth Anne had seen her stirred but twice in the months she had known her, and then by things that touched her own inner being.

The Saturday morning was damp, heavy and hot. Barbara, looking thin and white, ate a grape-fruit and read her letters. Ruth Anne wanted something to happen; she must see what she could do.

"Barbara dear, you said we should go sometimes to the House in the Woods for a few days to rest, and we haven't. Mayn't we go now, for over Sunday?"

RUTH ANNE

Barbara regarded Ruth Anne's coaxing pout, then went on with her letters. The child was restless these last few days, tired of the heat and monotony. How stupid she had been not to see it.

"Of course we may. We'll motor down after lunch. I'll call up Barnes and tell her we're coming. It will do us both good." She gathered up her letters and asked Miss Craig to get Parkwood for her. Another trained nurse had come in while she was ill, and there would be plenty to attend to the work, which was light on Sunday on account of so many babies being home to drink beer with their families; and Dr. Mahoney should come and dine with Miss Craig.

It was Ruth Anne's impish love of adventure which took her to the House in the Woods that day. If she could not have love affairs of her own she could at least stir up other people's. Barbara's had been stagnant so long now, almost all summer, she wondered how her friend could endure it. She purposely went out after their late tea to sit on the veranda giving a view of the high-road to their neighbor's place, though only the tip of a gable of the château was visible through the heavy foliage.

"Why don't you let Mr. Lawrence know you're here? I'm sure he'd come over."

RUTH ANNE

"Ruth Anne! I hope you don't think I came out here to see Tom Lawrence!"

"No, but I did. It's too bad, our sitting here alone and he's probably tramping back and forth on his empty terraces, thinking of you—and such a nice soft rain coming down! I'll let him know we're here, anyway," Ruth Anne exclaimed, a happy thought sending her indoors to switch on all the lights,—“there, if he doesn't see that, it's because he doesn't love you.”

The signal was unnecessary. Tom Lawrence's tall swinging figure hove in sight on the gravel path and came up, hat off, through the drizzle, with a cheerful hail.

"What luck!" cried Barbara, unfeignedly glad.

"Yes, what luck that your chauffeur came over to gossip with mine," replied Lawrence, shaking the wet off his coat and sitting comfortably where the breeze from the bay brought up long rushes of rain-filled air.

Ruth Anne moved restlessly about, making little excursions out into the dripping pathway under the trees, going in for cakes and wine, coming out again with a quite superfluous crêpe shawl for Barbara and finally disappearing altogether in quest of something else.

In her room she could hear the faint hum of their voices from below as she lay by the window

RUTH ANNE

reading; she was having a beautiful time. It seemed hours after, the rain had stopped and it was clear, and she knew it was very late when Barbara came in, a faint pink color in her cheeks, cool and soft from the dampness.

"You incorrigible girl, if anything terrible ever happens to me it will be your fault for not chaperoning me properly." She put out the light and sat in the darkness on the bed.

"He's changed in some way, I can't describe it. He's been mastering himself since we went away, doing solitary battle with the enemies to his peace, settling down like an old man to the acceptance of his lonely lot. Doesn't see any people, talks of books, books, and books, seems to have let go of business, stays out here. Mrs. Boardman is with Helena,—she took wing at the first breath of scandal, thought it more important to stay with daughter than with son-in-law. I suppose the gossip about Helena has something to do with it. He's so proud, how he must hate it."

"I didn't know about it," faltered Ruth Anne.

"Nor I—I never hear gossip—until Edith told me, knowing that Tom was my neighbor down here and my old friend. She hears everything, Edith does. She comes from her clubs fairly bursting with scandals. I wonder sometimes if there isn't a daily bulletin of some sort

RUTH ANNE

put up there with all the choice morsels classified and epitomized."

"Tell me what it is, or I'll go straight in and ask Edith; or isn't it for the *jeune fille*?"

"Oh the young person these days knows everything—it's only a man trailing about with the department of propaganda. She is ravishing, you know, she's wickedly beautiful, a cold little parvenu with no heart at all. It's Arthur Barlow, the fat one; he was distracted over Rebecca last year, but she was far too clever for him,—she knew his attentions were no compliment to any woman. Let's not talk about it any more. I hope mother-in-law puts a stop to it. But—it's changed him, for of course he knows it. He isn't bitter or disturbed but more terribly quiet and intense and philosophical. He's amusing himself with Greek poetry at present."

"Think of writing Greek poetry to satisfy his soul when he ought to be beating his children."

It was long before Ruth Anne could go to sleep, she could think of nothing but the spoiled and wasted lives of these two splendid people.

Perhaps she herself had even now lost her opportunity too, who knew? Perhaps nothing better than the little interne's romantic young love would ever come her way. She might have loved him enough if she had tried. She was asking too much of life; ought she not to take what

RUTH ANNE

it offered her, gratefully, thankful of the opportunity for wifehood and children? Her thought went back to John like the swing of a pendulum,—it was possible that he did not love her at all; that he loved that far more attractive and alluring Rebecca with her airs and graces of the stage; perhaps those things suited him better, with his gay, buoyant, ambitious, publicity-loving temperament, than her own quiet, gray, contained and unexcursive personality. Something in her, the dull ache in her bosom, the loneliness she had felt in Bishop's House without his flying visits, her continual thought of him more than all else, occupying her waking thoughts, tormentingly convinced her that she cared for him.

They were both thoughtful and silent at their late breakfast on the west porch, reading the Sunday papers, watching idly now and again the movements of a big black velvety bumblebee hanging caressingly over a tall purple larkspur near the railing, swaying and nodding to him invitingly while his bonnet grew more golden with pollen at every kiss. The soft drone and hum of the myriad little insect life in the wet shrubs and flowers of the garden came to them lazily. Jack was luxuriously sniffing the morning breeze, when suddenly he sat up alert and dashed down the steps. The purr of a motor broke the drowsy quiet.

RUTH ANNE

"Did I order the car out this morning? I don't remember;" asked Barbara, just as John, fending off Jack, appeared around the corner of the driveway.

"You are covered with mud," cried Barbara, "go and get washed directly! Your car must be a sight!"

"It is," assured John gravely, mopping his face and following his hostess into the billiard-room lavatory where there were always clean things for motor-men.

John lounged out easily a quarter of an hour later, fresh and cool, to the table where a pot of hot coffee was waiting for him.

"What a lark to have you at breakfast—we were so dull," said Barbara, dropping in two lumps while Ruth Anne smothered his berries in Devonshire cream, and shook her finger at him.

"We've been reading all about you in the papers."

"Yes, we know to a penny the price of votes. They seem to be frothing over it. Honestly, John, how much did you pay your socialist friends to come in?"

"There's no 'honestly' in politics, you unsophisticated person. We made them political concessions, as you can see if you read your paper. By Jove, but it was a fight, those old muttonheads from down state bucking us, always

RUTH ANNE

for a few thousand more, for three straight months—no let-up, just a steady tug of war.”

“Then there *was* graft!” Ruth Anne looked puzzled; “what a terrible time you must have had!”

John roared with delight. “It’s the psychical time for graft in every state once in six years according to my observation; but don’t try to understand politics, my dear, nobody does.”

Barbara went into the house and they soon heard the roll and crash of the organ from the music-room.

“What’s the matter with Barbs to-day?—she only plays Handel when she’s got the blue devils. Funny to be playing a mass, isn’t it, for her?” commented John, passing his cup to Ruth Anne who was suddenly strangely silent.

“We,” she ventured, “we thought you were gone.” She spoke quietly. He looked up smiling at her tone.

“Is it so important,” he hesitated, “to you, whether I was or not?” He leaned toward her over his cup.

“But were you?” she persisted.

“Evidently not, since I am here, my dear Ruth Anne. I had to go down state on some business for dear old Bill, and be quick about it too. I didn’t have time to ’phone you. I came over the minute I got back, I assure you I did.” He liked

RUTH ANNE

to be giving an account of himself to her, it was so significant that she wanted it.

"Oh!—it doesn't matter, only we thought you were gone to Devil's Gap," she answered, absently fingering the bowl of nasturtiums.

"I couldn't go without seeing you again. I wish you'd come to Devil's Gap for a while, I'm going to be terribly lonesome without you, dear."

"Perhaps Barbara could go——" She didn't know what she was saying, her brain was numb, her hand was still from fussing with the flowers, it lay trembling on the table near the coffee-urn. He laid his on it very gently, rising from the table.

"It's you I want with me at Devil's Gap and everywhere, all the time!"

She looked up at him, almost frightened.

"What about Bishop's House and the babies?" she whispered.

"Babies and Bishop's House and all— Won't you come? I need you."

She rose and stood facing him, taking her hand away, swaying like the stalk of the larkspur toward the bumblebee in his mist of pollen.

He was leaning toward her, his face very near to her. Her lips were trembling, faltering an answer, when his touched hers ever so lightly and her eyes closed.

XXII

RUTH ANNE's empirical quest seemed at an end for a time. She was absorbed again in mere sensations, novel ones. She was resting on her laurels, and very green and glossy ones they were to her, rather than seeking new fields to conquer; all those so far as her present eye could reach *were* conquered. She had what she desired, the supreme thing of her constant seeking.

Her time divided itself automatically between two equally absorbing occupations: waiting for his letters and answering them. They were her first love letters from John—he had written her sometimes in training-school days—but they were not the deliciously thrilling things she had imagined they would be. Still, they satisfied her. John was not much given to sentiment, she supposed he had had no time for it, he had been a busy man. The Devil's Gap club seemed an enchanting society of human beings who loved each other's society and made the most of it; his letters conveyed an atmosphere of congeniality and contentment in every line and always concluded with the variously worded statement that he missed her every day and wished she were with him. That had been the dominant note in his brief

RUTH ANNE

love-making, that he wanted her, and she felt in each reiteration a new thrill.

Since there were but two posts a week from that far-away place, her collection of love letters was not by any means large as the end of his stay approached; yet, few as they were, they were as many and of as tender a quality as she ought to expect from a busy practical man. She could not expect him to write the thrilling effusions Dr. Webster had lavished upon her in his love-making days. They were boyish and foolish, almost undignified; these were a man's letters, she said over and over again to herself—and yet in her heart she felt there was something lacking. She opened each one eagerly, with trembling fingers, hoping it would hold something of a higher pitch, something more intimate and tender than the others, even something more foolish. But each one left her calm, dreamily smiling, thoughtful; he had reached the height of his passionate demonstration the summer day his lips sought hers by the garden, and that had been good-by too; she had had no chance to feel either a diminution or increase of the ardor of the personal relation; it had been dignified, intense, earnest. That attitude would return when she felt again the contact with his almost irresistible personality; when he was with her he dominated her, she could think of nothing else, it had been so sudden,

RUTH ANNE

though for so long so intensely desired, his taking possession of her, and in a moment as settled and arranged as though it had always been. She had no sense of strangeness in their new relation, somehow but for that one first moment it seemed to be between them as it had been for a long time.

He would come back soon now, rapturously to take her in his arms, to reassure her of his need of her, of their hopes of happiness together, and they would begin their plans. She thought much of these plans; they were very simple, unformed ones, perhaps ridiculously unpractical ones, but she did not care, she was absurdly happy in contemplation of them. They would be married at Bishop's House of course, Barbara had said they could have the House in the Woods for their honeymoon, then on to the capital to begin her training as a politician's wife. She had delightfully vague ideas of what a state capital was like—she must have two or three Paris gowns for great occasions, inaugurations, etc., though of course she would set an example of simplicity. She had visions of being the sort of hostess one reads about in English politics—and never meets—keeping open house for the party whips, whatever they were. There would be many books to read, political problems to master—it would all be fascinating. And if she did tire of it there

RUTH ANNE

would be Bishop's House to run away to, and Barbara and the babies to play with.

In the whole situation she could think of nothing more satisfying, more really miraculous than that closer relation with Barbara, almost that of a sister. Barbara hadn't talked about it with any enthusiasm, indeed it seemed hardly to have occurred to her at all. She had had presents from Edith and letters from all the other Hunts welcoming her into the family, though the engagement had not yet been publicly announced, but from Barbara hardly a word or a demonstration for either John or herself though she had had the felicity of having the wonderful event take place under her own roof. It wasn't like Barbara, she didn't understand it. There was nothing so depressing as silence; it robbed her of the joy she would have had talking over many things with her, things her friend could make clear to her, knowing John so well.

Perhaps it was due to Barbara's own bitter experience in marriage that she was afraid for others, but was she afraid for John or for her? John was so big and fine and Barbara loved him so like an older tolerant sister— She wondered what she lacked in Barbara's eyes to make him happy—something, what was it?

Aside from her lack of interest in the affair of John and herself Barbara was more maternal

RUTH ANNE

in her attitude toward her, more tender, gave out more if that were possible—for she had from the first given bountifully—of the spiritual emanations in which she walked as in a shaft of light. And with this it seemed Ruth Anne must be content and wait to learn the cause of what she could not understand. There seemed altogether, first and last a deal of waiting to be done in the world.

The same post, one early September morning, brought among others to Bishop's House, three letters: one from John to Ruth Anne saying he was staying on for another ten days' shooting and would not be able to write her again as he was going fifty miles inland from the rail; the two others, for Barbara, were one from Edith saying they were all coming home at once and would be there on the heels of the letter, and the other from Rebecca Hayden announcing her arrival in town for rehearsals of "The Greater Sin" to open the next week at the Grand, and asking her beautiful beloved Barbara to come as soon as possible to see her.

Ruth Anne was disappointed at John's delay. There was nothing to bring him back of course if he wanted to hunt, except that he had *said* he would return September first and then they would plan. Perhaps he was planning already, masterful man that he was, perhaps he was going

RUTH ANNE

away into the wilds to think out things for them both, that this was the masculine equivalent of a maiden's days of meditation and prayer before committing herself to the keeping of her lover forever. She liked to think of him, clean, cool, lean, and strong, striding away into the stillness of the virgin forest, living simply, spending his nights under the stars, consecrating his thought to her—sometime (afterwards) she would ask him. This vision so possessed her that she smiled dreamily with a far-away look when she told Barbara that John was staying on. Barbara, thinking of Rebecca and a trifle off her guard, opened her lips incredulously, and looked puzzled a minute, but the glowing idealistic face opposite her was oblivious of her pause, then she said with interest:

"Indeed, it will do him good, of course. A month isn't rest enough after his too strenuous winter."

"Oh, I'm glad you think so too. I—I think it's splendid."

Evidently Ruth Anne's dreamy eyes saw something she did not, for she thought it was beastly selfish of him, but then he was that at all times; Ruth Anne would learn it soon enough.

"Rebecca's in town, I'm going to see her this morning, and later to Edith's, she says they arrive on an early morning train."

RUTH ANNE

Barbara returned late in the afternoon, looking tired, with circles about her eyes and within them a defiant battling look that her friend had never seen there; a set look about the mouth made her forbidding to question, but when she spoke her voice was so soft, so caressing almost as to be startling in contrast. Something had moved her again, stirred her to her depths, to some fierce and firm stand, though where, and why and upon what, were questions Ruth Anne asked herself vainly until the next morning revealed to her again her old Barbara, calm and serene.

Yes, she had seen Edith, who sent her love and was coming to-day to see them. Becky was very busy as usual, was very happy with her leading man for a wonder, and had some gorgeous costumes. Barbara had bought seats for the opening night and Rebecca had asked them to come behind the scenes afterwards. She was quite vexed that they had not done so last time. She liked her dressing-room gay with flowers and friends after the play.

"So I promised her we'd come. She'll be going out to supper as usual on first nights, but we'll only stay a minute, and it will all interest you—the callers, the gowns, the mysteries of making-up, the most absolutely dissimilar thing possible to our prosy way of living, and most illuminating if you've seen it only from the other

RUTH ANNE

side." Barbara rarely took so much interest in any merely amusing thing; Ruth Anne thought her very kind when she had been troubled, to take so much pains to plan for her amusement, and then she quite forgot about "The Greater Sin" until the evening arrived when Barbara reminded her it was time to dress for the play.

She had been occupied counting off the days until John should return; it was now only two. She was really glad of the play after all, it would cut off one evening of waiting. And then there would be only one more, perhaps not that, he might come sooner after all. It was a wet and rainy week, she hoped it was uncomfortably cold at Devil's Gap and farther north, where John was.

They were coming down the stairs, pulling on long gloves, when the door opened with a rush, and Maria Cavaletti, her child in her arms and both of them covered with blood, fell on the floor at their feet. A gash across her forehead had quite mashed in her eyebrow and a stream of blood was pouring down, which she wiped off with her arm in intervals of wringing her hands and calling on *Jesu Maria*.

Barbara rang up Dr. Mahoney, Ruth Anne ran to the nursery with the *bambino*, one of the nurses came down with arms full of cotton, bandages, carbolic and iodine, while Miss Craig

RUTH ANNE

took notes of her broken Italian phrases and repeated her consoling conviction that Toni Cavaletti *would* kill her sometime.

They carried her upstairs and to bed before Dr. Mahoney came, bathed their hands, got fresh gloves and handkerchiefs, and so started for the play, Toni Cavaletti's evil eyes watching them from a friendly doorway across the street.

Ruth Anne thought they should not go, but Barbara was firm; Dr. Mahoney would stay until their return, it was all in the day's work, they must not let such things interfere with their plans. But Maria Cavaletti's face haunted them both with its tragedy through the bright streets, as they were whirled to the play, and it was only with the coming of Rebecca in the second act that another real intense tragedy filled their vision.

XXIII

REBECCA HAYDEN's first nights in a new rôle were social events of the first importance, and though it was early in the season for fashionable people to be in town, the smartly-dressed and critical made gay parties in boxes and orchestra while the rear of the house and its tiers of balconies were filled with the warm and admiring audience whose demonstrations Rebecca loved. It was her boast that both the highest and the lowest came in droves to weep.

The play was a fine thready one, intense and gripping, its ethics all wrong and yet she carried them with her, over the windmills and all. When they could not applaud they were dumb—a higher tribute to her tense scenes—and when she willed it, they wept. When all was done, and their emotions were limp and pulpy, they split their gloves for curtain calls, gloriously reckless.

She would bring her leading man, blushing and protesting, at every curtain, until the last, when she knew if she did not come alone she would never get her supper. An armful of roses almost concealed her gracious gratification as the curtain fell for positively the last time. The audience beamed, sighed, furtively stuffed away its wet

RUTH ANNE

handkerchiefs and went home. She was the same Rebecca Hayden whatever she played, her wonderful voice making captives of them all.

Barbara and Ruth Anne went out a side exit, along a brightly lighted alley-way, and to the stage door. The door-keeper eyed them keenly as they gave Miss Hayden's name, and let them pass, calling civilly after them—

“First dressing-room, right.”

They crossed the rear of the stage, the scene-shifters were taking down the setting of the last act, covering bric-a-brac and gilded furniture with dust sheets, manipulating ropes and pulleys. Ruth Anne stood looking over into the vast dark empty auditorium that had but a few moments before held a sea of rapt excited faces (what a fear she would have facing them!) and her thrill held her for a minute until Barbara drew her away into the wings, past a line of waiting men, up some steps and through a narrow iron door into the star's dressing-room.

With a cry of delight Rebecca threw her arms around Barbara, kissing her.

“You angel of light! I'll have you all over rouge—see there!”—she touched her finger to the red bow-shaped mark she had just made on Barbara's cheek; “and Miss Barnard, you darlings both of you to come. Do sit down, you shall have the arm-chair, Miss Barnard, and you,

RUTH ANNE

Barbara, the trunk. How did you like the play?"

"You were wonderful, as usual," smiled Mrs. Brewster.

"Oh, wonderful beyond anything!" Ruth Anne could only echo, her breath taken away by the whirlwind of emotions which Rebecca seemed to be swirling in.

"It is a beautiful part," she sighed gratefully, sitting down facing them and the door; she still had on the gown she wore in the last act, her big hat and brilliant make-up. Ruth Anne could not believe she was not acting still, she was so different from the calm and easy person who had come and had tea with them and cooed over the babies; she was so effervescent and artificial, so palpably posing.

Gretchen was hanging up gowns, rolling up stockings and tucking them into the slippers they belonged with, putting jewels into her black bag, whisking away a scarf here and a glove there, packing flowers into boxes.

"Aren't they beautiful, and so many—everybody's been so lovely. These are from my manager," indicating a monster bunch of roses, "and the Killarneys from your nice Mr. Hunt, as usual," she nodded gaily to Barbara, "he doesn't really forget me often."

Ruth Anne stared dumbly at the big mass of pink flowers Rebecca was helping to pack caress-

RUTH ANNE

ingly away, humming the while in a **high key** and smiling; there was no mistaking her **delight** in them.

There was a rapid succession of calls at the door now, the manager to congratulate her and present her with a small and apparently welcome manila envelope which she gave immediately to Gretchen for safe-keeping in the black bag, the press agent to have a whispered word and a good night. The heavy man, a fat, middle-aged, well-preserved old beau in white flannels and waxed mustache sat down for a gossip. Rebecca took a cigarette and offered her visitor one, which he took and then gallantly lighted both.

"Went very well, eh!"

"Yes," indifferently, puffing away while her pink fingers fluttered about restlessly as in search of something.

"That twenty-minute wait on third was a bad one——"

"Not enough shifters—Morgan was simply tearing his hair—it'll go better Monday." She was cooler now, quietly amused.

"But how they did take it! Eh? I say——"

Rebecca rose. "You'll have to excuse me, Sidney, I'm going out with my friends. Come again, do."

A little dark woman put her head in the door as Sidney went out.

RUTH ANNE

"Miss Hayden, will you ever forgive me——"

"You child. Heavens, yes. Don't you worry. Good night, my dear"—Rebecca turned to Ruth Anne—"she stuck, fresh from stock, but a little brick. Gretchen, I don't believe anyone else is coming, we can change— No, no, you must stay, we can talk while I clean up." She stepped behind the screens to take off her gown, still smoking. It was getting quieter outside now, only a departing footstep echoing across the stage now and again, laughing good nights said in the alley floated through the open window. Rebecca came out again, tossed her cigarette into the ash tray, coughed, told Gretchen to open the door a bit. She had on now only a very scant and sheer negligée which partly fell off her shoulders and which she wrapped about her as she sat down before her dressing-table. Gretchen knelt at once and taking the little feet one at a time on her knee put on the shoes and stockings, pale pink ones to match the roses in the chiffon supper gown hanging on the wall beside the long draped cloak of a contrasting velvet.

"Isn't it a pretty gown!" said Barbara, lifting a fold of it. "Just like you, dear."

"Isn't it? It's Madame Julien's—she's wonderful, don't you think? You know she only makes gowns for artistes; she said I looked one

RUTH ANNE

big rose in it," Rebecca clasped her hands and regarded it adoringly.

"Which no doubt you do," assented Barbara.

Ruth Anne sat very still, smiling mechanically; there was a strange restraint between them, a confusion of low discords as of strings out of tune.

"It's too bad," Rebecca was saying, "I wanted to discuss the play with you, Barbara,"—she turned to Ruth Anne,—“but we always go out to supper first nights for luck, you know stage people are terribly superstitious. Now Miss Barnard, you'll see the real Rebecca; she's a fright without her make-up.”

She put her fingers into the cream jar, took a handful and spread it lightly over her face. It had been the face of a dissipated wicked woman with sin everywhere in its brilliant color and heavy lines and shadows. Then under the firm manipulation of a bit of fresh gauze, her own face emerged, the exquisite smiling lips, the soft round cheeks the color of rosebuds, her dancing, laughing eyes without a shadow of a line anywhere.

"Oh, you are lovely," breathed Ruth Anne softly, contemplating the radiant freshness, the girlish beauty of the woman at the mirror.

Rebecca turned impulsively to Barbara, laying

RUTH ANNE

a hand tenderly on her larger one patting it delightedly.

"Oh, it's nice to have friends and love and so many beautiful things!" She turned to the table again and gave her face a little dab with powder and chamois, while they heard a man's steps crossing the stage. Rising, she faced the half-open door, clutching her thin wrapper together over her breasts, leaning forward expectantly.

Her fingers trembled slightly as though moved by a wind; it was like a bird poised for flight. Then she became still, her eyes fixed on the doorway.

With the sound of the firm buoyant tread echoing heavily across the boards of the empty theatre, Barbara looked from Rebecca to Ruth Anne fearfully, waiting for the door to swing open, hardly breathing.

"Hello, Becky, not dressed yet? Are you hungry, darling?"

"John," cried Rebecca. "Don't, don't come in! Wait—till I'm dressed." She pushed him outside.

Barbara was still watching Ruth Anne; she was white as she rose and put her hand on her friend's arm. Barbara put her arm around her.

"We won't keep you any longer, dear. Good night."

When they got outside, turning round a barricade of scenery, they met John.

RUTH ANNE

"Good God, Ruth Anne!" he cried as they passed him, like shadows on the dim stage.

After they had gone Rebecca heard John calling out to her that he must go home with Barbara, the slam of the stage door, his heavy hurrying steps following them down the alley. Gretchen stood, the German in her recognizing the tragic moment, but not understanding it, frightened at her mistress' face, at the sudden stillness like death.

Rebecca dropped into her chair shivering:

"What a horrible thing to do! What a hellish thing to do!" She saw Gretchen holding her rose gown. "No—no; my street clothes—we will go home."

XXIV

BARBARA had her motor waiting at the corner of the opera house. "Let us get home as quickly as we can with safety, Davis." The chauffeur grinned his delight and sent the car westward over boulevard and cobble-stones at a speed that would have terrified her had she been conscious of anything but the shock and pain in the white set face beside her.

The play was over at last, the curtain fallen on the pitiful tragedy of which Ruth Anne had been unconsciously the heroine. The swing of the car around corners threw the limp little figure in white against her, the hands gripping her for support, then crouching again in the corner so still like a mortally wounded thing.

"Made it in six minutes, Mrs. Brewster," Davis was saying as he opened the door. Ruth Anne stumbled in getting out, and Barbara almost lifted her up the house steps. Lisa was at the door, her eyes brilliant with excitement, her face vivid.

"I was watching for you a long time—Cavaletti has been here twice for Maria—I don't know what we'd have done if the doctor hadn't been here—Miss Craig was going to send for the

RUTH ANNE

police—but Dr. Mahoney said not, it would only——”

Barbara interrupted her ready flow of information:

“Yes, yes, Lisa. How is Maria?”

“The doctor says she is all right, but he’s staying all night. He’s in the little guest-room and——”

Barbara had never seen Lisa so interested and happy. All she needed to make her forget her own wrongs was a sight of the wrongs of others.

“Come and help us undress, Lisa.”

Barbara went upstairs slowly, stopping and waiting on the first landing for Ruth Anne, who was leaning on the newel post, her cloak slipping off her shoulders, oblivious alike to Lisa’s chatter about Maria and to Barbara’s waiting.

Barbara looked down at the slim little luminous figure in the dim hall, she wanted to swoop her up in her arms and love and comfort her, but she dared not—Ruth Anne had a dignity all her own that she dared not violate for her soul’s sake.

“Coming, dear?”

Ruth Anne shook her head.

“I’ll stay down a while, I think, thank you.”

She stood dumbly for a minute longer, then moved across the hall and into the dark office.

Lisa was fluttering about from bureau to wardrobe helping Barbara to undress, hanging up her

RUTH ANNE

cloak, packing her hat away in rustling tissue paper, doing a thousand little things with her deft brown fingers, when the door-bell rang violently. Lisa's face went a shade paler; she stood in the middle of the room, her eyes big and frightened.

"No, it isn't Cavaletti," said Barbara slowly. "Don't be foolish. It's Mr. John, go and open the door. You'd better wait down in the little reception-room to lock up again. Miss Barnard is not well and may want you."

Barbara had been going toward the stairs while speaking and now stood leaning over the high dark railing. Lisa ran quickly down, while the bell pealed thunderously again. There was the sound of a man's voice below and Lisa's ready reply. Yes, it was John. Well, she couldn't do anything. She went into her room and closed the door.

"Shall I put on the light, Miss Barnard?"

"Yes." She shrank a bit from its glare, then—a slight setting of her lips, a lifting of the head, a stiffening of the whole figure, bracing herself against the dreaded encounter. She stood so a moment until Lisa had picked up her cloak and was gone, then she sat down in the desk chair.

John came to the door, and stood looking at her. He felt somehow as though he had come on stage without his cue; perhaps a second's waiting would give it him.

RUTH ANNE

She was pulling off her glove and did not look up—she was wondering why he had come. What could he have to say to her? Or she to him, for that matter? It seemed quite finished, everything.

“Ruth Anne!” He spoke with a note of appeal and yet it carried a demand almost sternly.

She could not answer; she was not sure of herself, she might even cry. She dared not open her lips for fear of what might issue forth. If he would give her time, just another minute, some help must come. She hardly breathed, so quietly she held herself.

“May I come in?” His voice now was more hard but low and steady and a slight strain of impatience in it as though he were holding on to himself with effort.

She had the glove off now, she laid it on the desk, with most deliberate carefulness selecting a spot free from dust on one of Miss Craig’s clean record sheets.

“Yes,” she said stiffly, her voice sounding strange to her ears. She had feared it would be faint and trembling like her whole body within, but it was clear and firm like another person’s. She was finding her calm, it was coming to her, rushing to her aid from cool depths of her being, that thing of spirit and at once of blood and

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breeding which so easily masters the most turbulent.

He came into the room and stood a little way from her, she seeming so small and frail yet so indomitable as he looked at her. She was loosening the other glove now, provoking tricks woman had of disconcerting you. If she would only look at him and he could see what was going on behind those drooping eyelids. She was of course making a stunning and perfectly pardonable effort *not* to let him see what was going on. She was suffering then. In a moment perhaps he would have her in his arms, weeping, then it would be easy to explain and be forgiven. His flexible voice veiled the victory he could already feel, and became almost tender in its hoarse vibration.

"Ruth Anne, I'm—I'm a beast."

She went on pulling at her glove. Surprisingly it did not occur to her to question this statement, but evidently some sort of answer was required; if she said *no*, that might precipitate an argument and decidedly she was not up to an argument. She hazarded:

"Yes?"

It required great effort and came slowly, still from some strange and remote place.

"I don't want you to think I've done this all purposely, cold-bloodedly"—He stopped—She

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must say something this time, her *noes* and *yeses* were such ghastly things; he wondered if he should have to face another.

The ticking of the big clock filled the room, she hardly breathed, she leaned forward with the glove she had just finished taking off and laying it beside the first one, as she patted it, answered him.

"No, of course you couldn't know I would be there." There was a faint breath of apology in her low smooth inflections.

What a devil of a woman, one couldn't even have a proper quarrel with her! He changed his tactics a bit:

"Oh it's a long story, it goes far back of that."

"Yes, I suppose so." She stopped and then went on, since she had begun or rather since he had begun it, there were things she wanted to find out, perhaps he would tell her: "Where there is so *much* superstructure, there must be *some* foundation," she finished with a perceptible rising inflection. She took up her gloves again and was turning them, straightening them out carefully, critically eyeing their black finger-tips. She wondered now why she had flung him that last bait. Out of the interview she must arrange a basis of reconstruction, a sort of *modus vivendi*. She did not want to lose John altogether, she must let him cloak himself as best he could, since

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there was so little chance of any decent garment falling in charity on his shoulders, unless she gave it him,—perhaps she could after all.

Somehow if it could be arranged so that they might all be friends— He had so filled her life, become so a part of their daily thought and concern, it was impossible to think of days in which he would have no share. Of course he would marry Becky and she would add to their charming circle; it must be arranged so that they should all be friends again. His voice interrupted her. He was defending himself.

“Ruth Anne, there are things in us, forces we have no control over. I’ve been fighting this thing—Good God!—I can’t help it.” His voice vibrated and shook as with a confession breaking into turgid depths.

“I’m not a good man nor a strong man, but I’m a better man, a stronger man than I would have been without the love of women——”

(Sit tight, now she was going to hear it at last, quite as much as was decent for her to hear, in all conscience.)

“Women make a man what he is. Whatever he is, is the product of the work of the good or bad, conscientious or unscrupulous, clever or stupid women he has known intimately.” He was walking back and forth, speaking rapidly.

“I have loved women, not one but many. Do

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you think a man lives a man's life without the love of women? He would not be a man, with a man's attributes of power, if he did. The stimulus, the growth and development that come to a man through women are by far the most potent sources of strength in him.

"Show me the women a man has known and loved before thirty—after thirty doesn't count, the formative years are finished then—and I will tell you the kind of a man he is.

"Do you think men spend time and money on actresses and singers for suppers and jewels, for the bravado of being seen in their society or for the easy hours of caresses? It is because they give us something, from their broad, free, far-reaching, perpetually increasing experience, from their subtle knowledge of life—something we need, something without which we are incomplete, unfinished and crude. They develop the masculine, dominant element in a man, the element that fights, that masters the world, subjects the powers of earth and air to him.

"They have in them the powers to inspire creative effort; without them we are nothing, any of us. That is my creed, my symphony, my belief, whatever you will. Rebecca is the high-priestess of my cult.

"I cannot loosen her hold on me and I should be adrift if I did. I had to come back to her.

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I had to see her. God, I've found she's the only woman in the world for me now, there's nothing I shall ever want as much as I want her! I want to marry her, I want you to set me free."

"You were free, entirely free an hour ago, at the theatre; the first words you spoke bound you to her more closely than any mere tie between us!" Her voice had a ring he had not heard before in it ever.

"You will forgive me?"

"Yes."

"You do forgive me?"

"Yes."

"We—we are friends again?"

"Yes." She rose as if to say good night, he took her hand, holding it almost gratefully a second. She looked up steadily, deliberately. What he saw in her eyes maddened him.

"Damn you—damn your *yeses* and your *noes*! You don't care—you never did care—you don't know what love is." He dropped the hand he had been crushing in his; she fell away from him, her back to the wall, lips parted, eyes fixed on his, her arms extended along the wall as for support. Again she had the sensation of stinging blows falling upon her.

"You only wanted to be married, to marry anybody. You never gave me anything, you never had anything to give—no love in your

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heart. Do you wonder that I went to someone else? To someone who had something to give worth the giving: a heart full of love, understanding, sympathy. She's worth a thousand of you. I'd go through hell for Rebecca!"

Ruth Anne covered her face with her hands, silent, her back to the wall still. John rushed out, slamming the door. Cautiously, unsteadily, she left the support of the wall and reached the desk, groping with her hands for the chair as though in the dark, and then resting her head on her folded arms, a bent and crumpled-up figure in the bright light.

Lisa, yawning, went to throw the lock on the door. There was a crash, the fall and rattle of glass, and Lisa's scream.

Barbara swept down the stairs and into the room where Ruth Anne lay on the floor strewn thick with glass, blood running fast over her shining hair and on to her gown.

Barbara took her up quickly, holding her close to her bosom like a crushed white rose and so on up the stair.

XXV

WHEN Toni Cavaletti hurled the piece of curbing stone through the office window of Bishop's House he did a far more important thing than securing a six months' sentence for himself in the city jail; he set in motion influences and forces which were no part of his revengeful plan, and of which not even Barbara of the clear long vision detected the operation until they were quite beyond any control, for that stone changed the devious winding current of Ruth Anne's life from its narrow way and sent her singing to the shining sea.

That wasn't the immediate result, however. It began by Barbara's sending for Dr. Hollander when Dr. Mahoney had dressed the cut in her head and said she was suffering from shock and in an almost critical condition. Her own physician had better be sent for—children's specialists weren't much good at nerves. But he stayed on in the house quite as though he belonged there, and took his orders like an interne again from his distinguished attending man.

Ruth Anne's return to active consciousness was a slow and uncertain process. After the strain and stress of the first critical forty-eight hours were over, during all of which Dr. Hol-

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lander had been in hourly communication with them either in person or over the wire, and all in the house were beginning to feel the great danger was past, Dr. Hollander sought out Barbara. The time had come when a knowledge of details was essential, the detail and succession of causes responsible for the unaccountable state of shock in which Miss Barnard still continued.

The doctor had had from Dr. Mahoney a much condensed account of the evening's events; the affair of Maria Cavaletti which had first stirred her though she had seemed quite cool, the going to the play—an emotional play, by the way, which he considered most unhealthful—the return of the party from the theatre, the crashing of the stone through the window and the finding of Miss Barnard heavily unconscious and slightly cut about the head. She was alone in the room, she probably saw the man's face at the glass, was frightened speechless in her already wrought-up condition—no one had heard her cry out—then the quick collapse with the splintering of the glass about her; to Mahoney it was entirely clear.

After two days of fighting, still harrowing days of terror to Barbara, and waiting for the changes in condition due in the regular progress of shock, Dr. Hollander sought psychical causes for the delay in improvement.

Barbara had followed Dr. Hollander out of the sick-room, waited while he talked with the nurse, wrote and signed the orders for the day; and then

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with turbulent anxiety, with a horrible dread of what he would say, she closed the door on them both. She felt as she had years ago after some childish atrocity when her father had taken her to his study for discipline; within her she had as much the feeling of the culprit as in that far-off time. She knew quite as well as Dr. Hollander that it was neither Maria Cavaletti's gory terror-stricken countenance nor Toni Cavaletti's stone that was responsible for the hanging by a fragile thread of her friend's life these days. She wondered if she would have to tell him all—the *all* being a great deal more than she had bargained for in any wildest imagining of results of her ever so slight interference in John's and Ruth Anne's and Rebecca's affairs.

After all, all she had done was to put Ruth Anne into communication with facts, longer concealment of which would have made her equally responsible in the increasingly disastrous result which must have overwhelmed the trio. She wondered whether she herself, who had stage-managed the affair to its pathetic curtain, knew all there was to know; whether much wasn't the conjecture of her harrowed mind. She must select carefully what she knew from what she suspected and imagined in giving to Dr. Hollander what he had come to ask of her, though he should of course have both or all if he demanded them, which was his privilege.

She felt strangely dominated by him as they

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stood facing each other ; her bigness didn't count, he was so much bigger in every way, like a giant who could crush her.

"Mrs. Brewster, I want you to tell me what is the matter with Miss Barnard."

"My dear doctor, that's what we have you for."

"I don't know. You must know—you always know everything. I never knew a woman with a greater universality of information. What things you could tell us!"

"Oh, and what things you could tell *us*," she responded quickly to his mood, "you must be a perfect encyclopædia of information. You seize things and they at once vanish as into some deep well, some bottomless and quite unfathomable place. How I'd like to see inside your head!"

He shook off her banter and returned to the original question.

"Will you tell me what is the matter?"

"I don't know where to begin; I don't know how much you know."

The doctor was thoughtful, then he startled her with a question:

"Mrs. Brewster, did you ever cut down a tree? This is like a tree being chopped down. It will stand a succession of blows while great chips are hewn out of it. It is undeniably the last stroke which causes its fall. Now the stone and the breaking of the window were the *coup de grace*,

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but the other blows are not accounted for, by Mahoney's report; the penultimate one, for instance, must have made quite a good-sized chip."

Barbara was startled as she had been many times before at the immediacy with which he put his finger on the crucial point. It was like the accuracy of the surgeon's knife.

"It isn't her way to go to pieces over a little thing like the smashing of a window. I've been through things with her before"—his grim face was reminiscent—"stunning emergencies when she never turned a hair. Then there was that affair of the patient jumping out of the window; why didn't she go to pieces over that? Nothing could be *much* worse for a novice. There's something missing. Suppose we go back a way. She had been well all summer?"

"Yes."

"Overworked?"

"No, hardly; not recently anyway."

"Happy?"

"Yes, in a quiet undemonstrative way."

"She was engaged to be married?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"A month ago, to my sister-in-law's brother, John Hunt."

"Then why wasn't she more than 'quietly and undemonstratively happy'?"

"I don't know."

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He looked at her, his dark brows knitting.

"Mrs. Brewster, Miss Barnard's life is at stake. You do know. You must tell me."

"I can tell you what I think."

"That's a good girl; it's like the old days fencing with you again—" He waited.

Barbara told him about John and Rebecca, about visiting the star's dressing-room and the scene there, Ruth Anne's suffering coming home in the car, not anger or jealousy; everything up to the time that John had come and she had gone into her room and closed the door, "and then I don't know what happened any more than you do," she finished.

"Something like the lady or the tiger, isn't it? Well, what do you think?"

"He either came to make explanations and ask forgiveness, or to ask to be released to marry Rebecca, I can't tell which."

"Whichever of those things it might have been, she would have turned them over in the carriage—she is very quick-witted. She would have been prepared for that, however keyed up by all the rest. I can't see yet why that could have finished her. It was some quick thing, as quick as the breaking of the window."

Barbara followed him but she could not lead; somehow his astuteness got ahead of her.

"Then there was the tension of the tremen-

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dous self-control she exercised, or the emotional exhaustion of *not* being self-controlled, letting herself go," she was summing up.

"Or something else which you still haven't told me."

"You most maddening man, you will have one's heart's blood, you are descended direct from one of the old arch-inquisitors, Torquemada probably, with your boot and question." She could sit no longer steady under his gaze; she began pacing about in her characteristic manner, talking as she walked.

"It is all my fault. If she dies it will be my fault," she said quietly staring at him with her great eyes, "I knew Becky and John loved each other, but he had reasons for not wanting to marry her—I need not go into those now. Rebecca was in despair, she sent for me—at first I refused to interfere—at last I consented to bring Miss Barnard to her dressing-room after the play; she was to do the rest, whatever it was. It seemed easier and more efficacious than telling her, and people never believe what you tell them anyway. They must *see*. I was in a most difficult position with all three of them. I could only let them work it out themselves after I put things in train. Don't blame me; I had to do it. She's too fine to marry a man she doesn't love and who doesn't love her."

RUTH ANNE

His rousing tone of reply suddenly stopped her walking about.

"You think she didn't, doesn't love him? For God's sake why didn't you say so!"

"I didn't see what that had to do with it," she replied densely.

"But, *that* is what did it—the discovery that she *didn't love* him. It must have come to her with a rush in the humiliation of the quarrel, her danger and what she had escaped."

Illumination came to her: "That is what made her give up. Yes, it would,—you are a wonderful man."

"You were a brave woman, to do what you did."

"No, it wasn't bravery. It—it was cowardice. I was afraid. I didn't want to feel the least burden of responsibility, in what would have been a terrible mistake for all of them, for what would come after." She stirred him with the strong wave of feeling which swept over her,—
"When you've suffered twenty years for just such a mistake, you can't let other people go on and do the same thing—you might just as well have it over and die but once, and not a thousand times."

"My dear old friend, you are right. It will all come out right now; we'll make it."

"You see this is the second time she has tried to love——"

RUTH ANNE

"And failed?"

"Yes."

"Why doesn't she try life without that kind of love? There are other things."

Barbara shook her head.

"Not for her, she has been trying the other things. That is the only thing for us poor women. It is only when we find we can't have that, that we allow other things to fill our lives. You must believe with me that it is the greatest thing——"

Dr. Hollander was nodding his head as she talked.

"It is the greatest thing."

They were both silent for a time, while their stirred turbulent mood become normal again.

The doctor took out a card and wrote upon it, carefully replacing his eye-glasses in his pocket as he did so and flecking unconcernedly a speck of dust off his sleeve as he stood at the door.

"There is a nurse I wish you would send for—she happens to be off duty now. Get her as soon as possible. She is a wonder in cases of this kind. And let her have entire care of Miss Barnard. I don't think it will be too heavy. We must give our patient every help we can and I think Miss Lawson will fill her special needs."

Barbara stood looking after him, "A physician of souls they call him; I wonder if he is?"

XXVI

DR. HOLLANDER, this late afternoon, was filled with a sense of joy, almost of exaltation, a high satisfaction with his work and with life in general, which he seldom felt in his round of heavy and exacting duties; a long hard day filling engagements, meeting emergencies, consultations, planning his time to give, if only a fragment, sometimes but a smile and a nod, to everyone who needed. It was a rare thing if there was left over for himself a moment for the keen and unhampered enjoyment he was experiencing in his brisk walk.

The Indian-summer sun and wind and smoke gave a hazy, dreamy look to his lean, tawny face as he made his way westward, following the more open streets past playgrounds and the freer spaces of small parks in the middle-class residence quarter, the problems of the poor miraculously and for once all forgotten.

There was time, it was still only five o'clock, quite time wonderfully enough, he assured himself by a second glance at his watch, to take K street and go over to Bishop's House, before keeping his engagement at the Methodist Hospital to look at that interesting heart of Morton's. It

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wasn't his day to see Miss Barnard, not by any kind of reckoning in his dreamy brain, and it was the hour when the nurse was usually out, so he wouldn't be able to get her report bristling with accurate technicalities—still he had a decided feeling since he was in the neighborhood, it would be as well to drop in. He could never tell about to-morrow, he might have to go out of town, and he somehow felt that she needed him to-day, that there was something he could do for her just now, what it was he could not have told. He had thought of her a dozen times during the day, and during other days for that matter; her face had flashed between him and a dangerously sick patient he was consulting over, and persistently, almost shamelessly followed him from office to hospital. Some psychological phases of her case kept recurring to him; decidedly he was reading too much of Ellis and James and Dresser and those fellows lately. Anyway, she was on his mind and he must make the call if only to be rid of her. He stopped in his rapid stride for a moment and frowned as he suddenly realized that he had definitely and quite subconsciously planned his work all day so that he should have this hour free to go to her.

Miss Lawson was out having her hours—as he all at once came to see he had relied upon—and Mrs. Brewster was in the office engaged with a

RUTH ANNE

man who looked like an anarchist (how in touch they were with the world in this interesting house, these two so closely allied women), and he went up the staircase with his buoyant step following the ubiquitous Lisa.

Ruth Anne was in bed idly turning over an old portfolio of Roman photographs, reading the pencilings on them in her mother's hand; little notes they were, and she smiled sadly in reminiscence of those same places, of amused or critical or impressive moments they had had together in gray old churches, and on bright heights of splendor with storied pillars about them. She turned from them, still held by her dreaming, as Lisa opened the door for the doctor.

Her surprise took her in a warm pink wave that covered her face and neck, and in a sudden darkening of the gray eyes. "Why, Dr. Hollander!" she exclaimed. He towered over her at the side of the bed as she lifted her eyes wide and full of warmth and welcome.

"Miss Lawson is out, I am so sorry."

"You don't look it."

"Because I'm so glad to see you," she laughed.

He threw back his head, lifting his chin, and laughed comfortably. She went on still a little uncertain of what she was saying, and feeling hot and happy. "It's so stupid being alone for two hours—and Barbara is so busy—one's glad

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to see *anybody*," she finished clumsily. She smiled again at her stupidity, and as he joined her, it was as though she had stumbled and he had picked her up.

"Ring the bell, please. We'll have tea—have you time? Yes, of course you have, don't say no to-day." Tea was always such a help, how many days had been saved by tea!

He wondered why not "to-day," but did not ask.

It was a daring and delightful intimacy with this great man of whom she was still so afraid, to be lying here in bed and ordering tea for him as though he had nothing in the world to do but stay at her command like any vagrant idler. But there was something in his air to-day that disarmed fear, that invited liberties almost, and the hour took on an unaccustomed and holiday look. She felt afraid of showing it,—she knew she was showing it too much, but she could not help it,—he filled her cup so full it would run over.

Fortunately he didn't seem to be hearing what she was saying, and it probably wasn't worth listening to, but held to his look of determined and conscious enjoyment as though of some stolen and absolutely undeserved thing, and with an almost boyish emanation of delight in looking at her. They were so mutually aware of this delight that soon a silence fell and he was then

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moved to the necessity of a somewhat safer and more professional ground of adventure. He took up carelessly the photographs.

"Looking at pictures, as all convalescent children do?"

Her look grew grave, a trifle troubled. "You know, lying in bed days and days gives you time to think of lots of things deliberately and clearly. The things one ought to have done and the things one ought not to have done cry out in the long silences."

This then was what he had come for, here was one of the rare psychical manifestations of her "case." He sat up aroused to attention.

"I've been wanting to tell you, to talk to you about my mother."

It was nothing after all, he reassured himself, dropping back into his easy attitude of receptivity; "And you want to, now?" he asked, humoring her. He set his cup down and in doing so drew away from his too great nearness to her, to a place of better light and perspective. It was getting dusk fast and there was only the firelight in the room.

Her face had lost quickly its look of pleasure and was almost sharp in its pain, a look he had not seen there for days. "I want you to know," she was saying, "about that terrible fire in the theatre, that happened before we went away the

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last time. You remember?" She knew he remembered every detail of that tragedy by the grim gray look of his mouth and the way he looked past her and through her as he always did when deeply moved, far down within. He was so still when stirred.

"I didn't understand my mother so well then as I did later—we always understand people better after they are dead it seems"—Her voice trailed off hoarsely. She waited a moment and he said "yes" from out of some deep fastness of his being, and she went on, somehow sustained by that word. "There was a special revelation came to me after her death, and with it came understanding—of what a wonderful woman she was, how she had struggled and battled to reach her height, her patience and her victory. I understood so many things then that had been dim and beyond me before. I knew then, among other things, that she would have wanted to know—would have wanted to take her proper responsibility and right things with her wisdom and courage. For we *were* responsible, just as you said, through our ignorance that seemed indifference, but it wasn't that, do believe me. I was blind and foolish trying to save her that suffering. She would have wanted it. She wouldn't have wanted to run away, she would have wanted to stay." She finished in a high sharp crescendo

RUTH ANNE

that carried an almost tearful appeal for his belief. She was clutching the sheet, tensely waiting his reply.

"She *did*."

"She did! What? Want to stay?—How?"

"I told her."

"How dared you! How did you know—why *didn't* she stay then?" The questions were wrung from white trembling lips:

"I knew; I knew your mother. You remember we had had the previous winter together, when all of her thought, all of her effort was not her own desperate state, her tormenting and unceasing pain, but the burden that she was laying on you, shutting you away from the things she wanted you to have, interfering with your life, delaying its fruition. She was so strange in her feeling about you; she wanted you to drink the cup, but she was always taking it away from you. She knew with your temperament, so like her own, you would snatch it soon enough and drain it. The security and peace of your life together so satisfied her, was such a precious treasure, her hands lingered over it."

Ruth Anne was thinking as he brought up this vision of her mother, what wonderful hours they must have had together, those two, and she had never dreamed it. What a son he had been to his own mother, and what a lover he could be!

RUTH ANNE

"So, I knew she would want that opportunity. I could not deny it to her since it must, I was convinced, be her last one."

"And you gave it to her—how right you were," she murmured.

"If you had not sent for me that day, I should have come in any case. I knew she must go away; she had not the strength to do the things she was planning."

"I remember you stayed a long time that morning. I kept thinking as I waited outside, what a terrible time you were having. I heard your voices in deep argument."

"It was not so easy bargaining with your mother, for that is what it came to—bargaining. She would have made a famous diplomat. She only consented after I had promised all sorts of things. I was to look after, vicariously, all of those burned people and their families and children, and arrange pensions and allowances with Johnson and put a special social worker on their cases. Nothing was to be left undone; nothing *was* undone that it was possible to do with money."

Ruth Anne nodded. "And you had time, when your time is so full, so precious, to do all that—and the desire—while I thought only of running away. What a coward you must have thought me!"

RUTH ANNE

"I did. And that brings me to another thing. There was another promise. How I have kept it is for you to judge."

It was Ruth Anne who was still now, while he, moved and carried on by an intensity of feeling like that on that bitter day in the office, stood at the foot of the bed, his hands resting on the rail, leaning a little forward.

"She asked me to look after you: to help you if you ever needed it after she was gone. If you came any croppers, just to pick you up and brush off the mud and set you on your way again. I promised. It didn't seem much to do for her, it helped her a little perhaps to be less troubled about leaving you." He stopped a while, as she seemed overtaxed by this long talk, but he must get it over now it was begun. "You have seen how I failed to keep my promise. When you came to me after your cropper, I was so angry with myself at having let you *have* it, for not warning you of the danger, saving you from its humiliation and defeat—for it was an awful smash-up—that I didn't see how wrong I was. I lost my head. I was brutal. I left you to find your own way. And you have found it, gloriously."

"No, no; you did help me—nobody knows how much. Nobody else could have done it. Don't you understand?"

RUTH ANNE

"You do forgive me, then?" He came and took her hand. She hoped he would kiss it, but he did not, he wasn't thinking of that. He smiled reminiscently: "Your mother's own daughter—I hope she knows how fine you are."

Ruth Anne held his look as long as she dared. "You'll be late for your old hospital."

"Go to sleep now, you're tired." He watched while she closed her eyes, then turned abruptly, frowning, and went out.

Ruth Anne kept her eyes closed until she heard the final shutting of the street door down below, then opened them to a shining world. She drew her hands to her breast and held them tight, they were filled with coursing fire. It had come back to her, that hand-clasp of the miraculous morning when everything else in the world had been forgotten.

Dr. Morton, the heart specialist, had seen a great tender sympathetic physician bending over the panting spent figure on the back rest, and the little Italian girl had seen a splendid godlike creature with love and every wonderful attribute in his face; but what Hollander saw as he went into the ward, and stood by the bed and talked and came away again, was a pale face fine and beautiful on soft pillows, wistful trembling lips, and deep misty eyes; over the shoulder a heavy braid of hair that reflected gold back to the firelight.

XXVII

“ Miss LAWSON, is the doctor coming to-day ? ”

Ruth Anne was playing with Lisa's baby, fat and beautiful, on the foot of her bed. The room was fresh and cool, sweet with the pungent odor of late autumn flowers; her chair was in the big old-fashioned bow-window where she could sit and see the garden and the street. The morning was bright and crisp, one of a procession of the brilliant fall days which each year renews one's faith in a climate capricious and full of puzzling vagaries.

“ I don't know, Miss Barnard; people are coming back from the country now and he's very busy. They are like transplanted plants in the fall and need a great deal of attention, until they are acclimated to champagne, lobster Newburgh, ortolans, and humming-birds' tongues again.”

“ How clever you are—that almost sounds like Barbara,” she answered in the intervals of helping Lisalotte to master the bewildering intricacies of the five pink toes which would not stay in their booties. “ So you don't think he'll come. He hasn't been for four days now. He must think I'm well.”

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"He knows you are——"

"I'm not. I shan't be well for months and months! Anyway, I think he's coming to-day and I'm going to surprise him. I'm going to do up my hair and put on a proper dress."

"Then he will send me away."

"Oh, no, he mustn't. I don't see why I shouldn't keep you as long as I want. Who'd help take care of Lisalotte? Barbara's too busy, and her mother doesn't care, and nurse has no time to waste on such a healthy young lady, so you see you have to stay."

"Dr. Hollander doesn't allow his nurses to idle on cases, he says his otiose patients would corrupt all his good nurses if he'd let them. He's very firm. When he says go, I pack."

"He's a tyrant; I'll tell him so."

"Oh, no, you dare not," laughed Miss Lawson, "even you whom he spoils so."

"Is he *more* rude to other people than to me?"

"He's terrible sometimes."

"How afraid of him everybody is! You don't dare do what you want, any of you. He has even Barbara in subjection; as for me, I'm clay in his hands. He told me I *had* to get up, and sit up and dress myself long before I was able, and I *did*."

Miss Lawson laughed again: "You see you are afraid of him too."

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"No I'm not," Ruth Anne denied shamelessly, "I *wanted* to do what he wanted me to."

"There, you see, that's it. We all do. We know there's a reason, and we don't ask why."

"I suppose you adore him. Is there another man in the profession so beloved? Tell me."

"Probably not. We love to work for him as much as his patients love to be ruled by him, he combines so wonderfully the old Puritan attributes of God, love and fear." Miss Lawson's face was a study,—she was letting herself go, but pulled up sharply at her patient's next question. She had communicated some of her intensity of feeling to Miss Barnard, perhaps more than was wise. Anyway, the conversation was entirely unprofessional and leading on to dangerous ground.

"Does your heart stop, and you can't breathe or speak, when you talk to him even over the 'phone?"

"I can speak when I talk to him, but it isn't always easy, especially giving an adverse report; and I am dumb sometimes with the liberties patients take with him, when they send for him and don't need him, to drink tea with them and solve their family problems and feast their eyes and hearts on his strength like vampires——"

"I know what you mean. I'd have died with-

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out him, without what he gives, whatever it is. It kept me alive from day to day, until he came again. He brings it with him when he comes in and leaves some of it behind him when he goes. It's a stimulant, a sort of spiritual cocktail."

Miss Lawson's imagination didn't seem equal to carrying her quite so far as this comparison would take her, and Ruth Anne regarded her thoughtfully as she took another tack.

"You are the most wonderful little thing. You are like another half of myself; I don't feel that there's anyone strange near me, hardly that there's another person in the room. You have all the splendid attributes Barbara has of understanding and comfort, only you're condensed like a food tablet. I didn't think anything but love could be a basis for the nearness I felt to you. It never occurred to me that you didn't love me, from the moment you came into the room. I felt better at once, and though your coming disturbed me—you remember I was asleep when you came in—I went to sleep again directly with a sense of serenity and safety I had not had for a moment since that night. It must be love."

"It is love, love of my work, of my profession——"

"Love of your profession— Heavens! I never

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even dreamed what a nurse was until you came! Are there any more like you?"

"Yes—only we are all different. He has a number of nurses who are specialists. This is my specialty, you see."

"Just what kind of case am I, anyway?"

"You'll have to ask the doctor that. I'm not a diagnostician. One of the first things we learn in training is that 'diagnosis is not the province of the nurse,' and it's hammered into us daily."

"So I have heard," said Ruth Anne demurely.

"Anyway," Miss Lawson declared, "you are a very favorite case; I don't know of anyone in years he's given so much attention."

"He ought to, to make up. He was very nasty to me once."

"There you are; you *are* a favored patient!" she gave her convincingly.

"How long have you nursed for Dr. Hollander?"

"A long time; ever since I graduated."

"Then you know all about him?"

Miss Lawson was suddenly on her guard again, puzzled at the direct and almost childlike question.

"No. Nobody knows anything about him. The longer you know him the less you know; or to be more clear, you can't see the forest for the trees."

Ruth Anne's scruples over what she had once

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considered undue curiosity in regard to people's private and personal affairs had long since vanished, as she grew, and quite shamelessly, to learn that people's lives were by far the most interesting things in the 'world. There were multitudes of things still, she was sure, to be gotten out of Barbara, and even Lisa here under her very eyes, was an unplumbed well whose depths she could not conjecture, so baffling and mystifying was she. As for Miss Lawson, she positively yearned to get her to talk about herself, her experiences, the intrigues and plots she must have participated in vicariously, a thousand things of alluring interest; but she was diplomatically noncommittal.

Dr. Hollander did come to see her later in the day, and found her really dressed despite Miss Lawson's warning that he would send her away.

"Where is my patient?" he asked smiling whimsically as he made an almost imperceptible sign to the nurse that she might go out.

"I'm afraid you haven't any," said Miss Lawson, departing.

"I haven't thanked you yet,"—Dr. Hollander was shaking hands with Ruth Anne as she spoke,—"and I want to now, doctor, for my nurse. She's wonderful; you won't mind if I say she has helped almost as much as you,"—she wouldn't flatter him anyhow. "Are there many such nurses, I wonder?"

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He was looking at her as she asked and continued to look down at her, the rapt, reverent look coming into his face, the same look of seeing a vision that she had caught there that first day in his office. That magic elusive light flashed across his face and was gone as he answered:

"No, there are not many such women one knows in a lifetime, and they set such a high standard,—Mrs. Brewster is another one of them,—they make us too exacting sometimes of others, we expect them all to measure up to their gigantic stature." He took up her hand again, testing the pulsation. "Strong to-day," he was studying her from between narrowed eyes, keenly measuring her gain in the last few days.

"And do you think life is worth while now?"

"Ye Gods," thought Ruth Anne, "could anyone look at him and doubt it?" She answered:

"Yes, it's getting more interesting every day; its tragedies don't seem so terrible now, they—they seem quite right. You've given me a new view of life. I have tried, but I have failed miserably; you make everything so simple. I'm afraid I've thrown all the burden on you, but you seemed to be willing to carry it for me, and now when I'm ready to take it back—why, there isn't any. It's like magic. How do you do it?"

He shook his head delightedly, showing his even teeth in a broad smile.

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"Are—are you going to keep them?" she asked softly, puzzled at her feeling of ease.

He seemed not to hear her and yet his eyes were intent upon her.

"Are you?" she ventured again.

He rose and took a step nearer her, his stern face softened and lighted. She looked up quickly, she was afraid he was going; she wanted him to stay longer, she wondered how she could keep him. He had never been just like that except once on one of the days she had been very ill and he was looking down at her in her pillows. Her eyes had been closed, she opened them suddenly and caught just that soft tender expression and then he turned with some question to the nurse. It was as though he had dropped his mask for a moment—and now it vanished again like the sun suddenly under a cloud.

"Of course I am! What do you want with them?" He spoke gruffly: "Other people's troubles are our best blessings, but"—he went on lightly—"we are platitudinous to-day, it seems."

"I'm not."

"No, that's true; you're refreshingly the reverse, as always."

She was standing now too, laughing, holding out her hands to him. He took them gallantly.

"You'll do now," he cried, "you can go down—

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stairs to-morrow, motoring, out-of-doors these glorious days, anything you want, not too much at a time. Miss Lawson will go to-morrow; I need her. If you shouldn't feel just right after a few days come to the office." He was taking his leave; in a moment he was down the stairs and was gone.

"Miss Lawson," she called nervously, "I'm well, and you're to go to-morrow,"—she was thinking rapidly of the things she must know, must find out to-day. "Isn't it terrible? I've had such a beautiful time—and you've been so good—I shall never have such a good time again." She was restlessly moving about, pinning up her hair, fussing with letters and cards on her desk. "And do you know what he said about you? He said there were few in the world like you! Think of that."

"Dr. Hollander is very good——"

"I was wondering," she said absently, almost dreamily,—“he has known some other woman like you. There was a sort of look came into his face when he said that, I can't explain it: a look reminiscent of something consecrated, almost holy, like the look of the priest at the Host.”

"He was thinking of *the* woman, probably."

Ruth Anne's telltale face flushed out warmly her eagerness for enlightenment.

RUTH ANNE

"Pardon me—I shouldn't have said it. I thought you knew—everyone knows."

Ruth Anne deliberately lied:

"Oh, yes; I've heard, of course—years ago I heard my mother and a friend discussing Dr. Hollander, but I didn't pay much attention. You must know really all about it, and who she was. There has been so much talk about it, I'd like the true version. You know you can hear anything, positively *anything* about people who are as prominent as Dr. Hollander."

Miss Lawson was debating. It was an emotional story, but her patient was well now, there was no reason she shouldn't tell her, and it was all so gloriously to his credit as a physician and a man. Yes, she should have it.

If she had been telling the story of the Manger she could not have been more reverent, nor more impressive in revealing a holy picture, so delicate was the touch of the hand that drew aside the veil.

"She was a nurse who came into St. John's to help take care of the typhoids returned from Tampa who filled the hospital after the Spanish-American War. She came from some charity hospital—the City Hospital, I think. Our nurses were dropping off duty every day, other nurses were afraid to come in, even our graduates, they were so terribly overworked. Dr. Hollander was

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staying at the hospital night and day—we didn't have the big staff then we have now—giving up his own patients. So he had a chance to know who the good nurses were. She was a beautiful woman and a perfect nurse. She stayed on regular duty all through that terrible time. Dr. Hollander warned her of the danger and ordered her off duty, but there was no one to take her place. She was taken ill and died of typhoid in the hospital. I shall never forget his care of her, his devotion to her. It was the most beautiful thing in the world. He didn't conceal it, we all knew that he loved her.

“After that he was never just the same to any of us. I can't explain it—your saying his face was like a priest's at the sacrifice of the Mass almost expresses it. That experience set him apart. She was beautiful, her soul shone through her like an unquenchable light, a fire, it burned and burned. She gave and gave with her hands and with her spirit. She was all that to us, and how much more she must have been to him with his greater soul, who understood her better!”

Ruth Anne was still, almost without breath, as Miss Lawson finished. “Of course I don't mean you to think that he meant I was at all like *her*, that is impossible; what he meant was that I was a good nurse as she was, and that is a great

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deal, for we all know there are no more like her."

Ruth Anne caught a visionary gleam of a miraculous face, then with the faintest pang of pain at her heart she said:

"Thank you—you—tell a story very well. I am tired. I will lie down, and you can go for your drive with Mrs. Brewster. I have been spoiled and coddled enough; I shall be all right, thank you."

Miss Lawson put her to bed before she went out. She thought she looked ill, there was a strained, overtired look in her eyes. Her nerves *weren't* up to the mark yet, whatever the doctor thought. Well she was staying until to-morrow anyway; it was probably the fatigue of the first day entirely out of bed.

Later on Ruth Anne watched her go out in the motor with Barbara, then she returned to her bed, not quietly and deliberately as an invalid should; she threw herself down passionately, bitterly, in a tumult of disappointment and despair, blackness shutting down all about her.

XXVIII

BARBARA came from the telephone, two unusual vivid spots of color in her cheeks. "Something's the matter out there at Parkwood, I can't make out what. It was Tom Lawrence—he wants me to come out. There's a train at nine. Will you order the little car for eight-thirty—I'll have to go by train, it's much too wet for the motor—oh, yes, there'll be a cab at the station—and then telephone Barnes I'm coming?"

On the train, which was usually almost empty at this season of the year and this hour of the morning, were Dr. Hollander, a distinguished surgeon, and an older man, famous as a diagnostician. That they were all bound for the same destination, that the same circumstance, a tragedy evidently, was bringing them all to the château, Barbara did not now doubt; that the matter was of the gravest consequence she was equally certain when three such eminent opinions were required, tremendous issues of life and death were the stake. It could not be Tom, of course, else he had not been talking to her. It must be Helena, there *was* no one else it could be. She wondered, stirred to her innermost, whether all this did concern her vitally; if it could be that

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something was going to happen to change everything for her—but she didn't want it at *this* price, she was not so wicked as that, much as she wanted Tom Lawrence.

Lawrence met them on the platform, shaking hands gravely and putting Barbara into a waiting brougham. "You'll come over at once? Mrs. Boardman has asked for you several times. She's alone and there's no one else she wanted."

"I'm glad she wanted me," answered Barbara as he closed the door. He took it so for granted that she knew what was the matter.

The big car with Lawrence and the doctors went on ahead at high speed and they followed through the woodland drive. She left her travelling-bag with Barnes at the House in the Woods and drove directly on to the château.

"My dear Mrs. Brewster," Mrs. Boardman was saying, "Tom is a wonder, isn't he? I said this morning I wished you were here to help me through these terrible days. I knew you would come and here you are." She was in a wrapper in a big chair by the fire, she stretched her hands out nervously to the blaze as she talked.

"I said I just had to have somebody, and you are so good to come. What with Helena at death's door and two trained nurses turning things topsy-turvy in the house, and doctors coming and going at all hours, it's too much, quite

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too much for an old woman like myself, Mrs. Brewster. It seems so neighborly and nice of you to come"—she was half crying.

"I have to bear it all alone, you know Helena is my only child, she's all I have—it's too overwhelming. They're going to decide to-day what they'll do, whether they'll cut her up or not. They came out just ahead of you—I heard them go by the door. There hasn't been a day without a squad of them coming and going since it happened. Dear Tom is leaving no stone unturned: he's had everybody to see her, a doctor all the way in our car coming back and specialists galore, and you know they are so expensive! But it doesn't make any difference, he's splendid about it."

"You know I was with her when it happened. I didn't get a scratch but the shock almost undid me. I'm not like this, you know; no one can say they ever saw me like this, incapable and useless, but I kept up until Tom came, and then of course there was no need—he's doing everything."

The old lady rambled on pitifully, twisting and knotting her heavily beringed fingers, wiping tears from her eyes, dabbling her cheeks with her soppy handkerchiefs.

"I don't know what they're going to do—that's what they're to decide to-day. She isn't

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suffering, you know. No, she's perfectly comfortable, only of course she can't move, with her head and back in that harness like a base-ball player's mask,—you've seen them, haven't you, in the crippled children's hospital? Well, that's what she wears all the time. But she hasn't any pain; no, not a bit." She swayed back and forth, gazing fixedly into the fire, still warming her hands.

"She's so beautiful, lying there, just the same as ever, only whiter and her eyes bigger—you remember her eyes—she was always so beautiful, you know. When we were staying at the embassy, and she was then only a child, a Russian grand-duke wanted to marry her. He said there was no one in the world so beautiful, she would adorn any court, and of course if she had this never would have happened; though as I told her she might have been blown up with a bomb, such terrible things happen in Russia."

"That's true," said Barbara.

After a while she heard the motor drive away again with the physicians and surgeons; there was a rap at the door and Tom stood there.

"Well, little mother, can you let me have Mrs. Brewster a few minutes? They haven't decided yet, Hollander will let me know by 'phone; I'll tell you the minute I know."

The house was so still, the room so still, the

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whole place so full of the feel of pain, of silent torture of racked bodies and brains and hearts.

"She's been like that ever since it happened. What you see is her effort not to be submerged; it's heroic."

"Since *what* happened, Tom? I don't know—I don't know anything about it." Barbara spoke tensely, almost sharply, shutting her lips tight to hold back the play of emotions over her face. She was standing facing him, her hands hanging by her side, palms turned toward him.

Lawrence took a turn about the room and came back. "Helena and Mrs. Boardman were touring with the Hortons in the mountains. There were six in the car at the time of the accident. They were taking a rapid grade, the brakes failed to work and they went over an embankment. The chauffeur and Mrs. Horton were injured, their other guest killed outright. Mrs. Boardman was not injured at all except for shock, while Helena—is alive, that's all. Her injury is spinal almost altogether; it hasn't affected her brain, however, that has remained perfectly clear every minute.

"At first they said Helena would die—there was no help, it was only a matter of a few weeks. Now we think differently. She has a chance to live a number of years if she survives the operation, so Hollander tells me. She is to decide

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that herself, whether she will take the one chance in about ten of the operation's success, and the years of lying in bed on her back, which is *all* they can promise at best. She is deciding now,"—he drew out his watch,—“I'm to go for her answer at twelve.” He was speaking mechanically as though reciting a lesson.

“Yes, Tom.”

“I am going now to Helena.”

They met again at luncheon, a formal meal full of apprehension. There was nothing to tell that anything was radically changed between them, that any epochal thing had taken place, and yet within an hour in that still room down there guarded by its sentinels in white it had been decided by the so still figure in the bed—her life and his—all there was left of it.

“I have telephoned Hollander. They will operate at nine to-morrow. It will take some planning to get things ready, but he said I could leave it all to you. Will you do this for us?”

“Yes,”—Barbara dared not look at him, her eyes rested on the outdoors bare and bleak, the black wet trees swept by gusts of rain, just beyond the long windows.

“He is sending out nurses and equipment this afternoon.”

When the surgical nurses came they hung sheets about the walls in the big morning-room,

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set up the operating and supply tables, disposed sealed jars of linen and gauze, adjusted equipment, tested and sterilized everything. It was late when they finished and closed the room, everything covered and white and spotless.

Mrs. Boardman insisted on going to the door. Barbara went with her.

"What a transformation—almost like a wedding, isn't it?" she exclaimed with a lack of comprehension almost ghastly; then something of horror came into her eyes, she shivered and put her hands into Barbara's.

"Such big, good hands," she murmured.

Barbara shivered too as she took her back to her room for her nurse to put to bed, and went back through the dark to the House in the Woods.

Early in the morning Barbara went again to the château. There was the expectant hush everywhere, the ominous stillness of yesterday intensified, in all the air the fear of the swift messenger; the low voices of awed servants, the impressive quietness of the nurses in their swift preparations, then the coming of the medical men, black-bagged and stolid-faced.

There were Dr. Hollander, the operating surgeon and his two assistants, the anæsthetist and the pathologist. She did not know it took so many great big men to straighten one poor spine;

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she could see Helena's flesh quivering, palpitating, bleeding under their terrible ministrations. Mrs. Boardman was ill in bed and would not need her to-day. From down the corridor came the permeating odor of ether, a sickening wave that told her it had begun. Outside the door of the operating room, stood silent and motionless a tall dark figure, grim and stern with folded arms. It was Lawrence, keeping vigil like some knight of old at his lady's window.

Two hours, three hours and fifteen minutes, and a nurse came to the door. Mr. Lawrence had sent her to say that the surgeons had finished. Mrs. Lawrence was still sleeping, of course, but in good condition.

Dr. Hollander was 'phoning orders in to his city office to his assistant, when Barbara found Tom alone in the morning room.

"I'm going home now, Tom. You'll let me know if Mrs. Boardman wants me. I'll come back if you want me—there doesn't seem to be anything to do now." She waited; she felt there were things he wanted to say, but after all words were idle things between them now when everything was still unsettled, both their fates hanging in the balance. When the crisis was over they could talk things out; there would be much to say *then*.

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"Thank you, Barbara. Yes, I'll let you know."

Barbara sat by her fire waiting—she knew that an hour or two would finish it for the rest of her life. The long November evening wore on slowly, almost endlessly; she could not read, books were full of empty words, she could not command her concentration to the page: every vital thing in her was wilfully, determinedly centred in a big still room of the great house across the road. It was a cold, frosty night; she piled up the fire but there were chill airs behind her, in dim corners of the room, that sent her back shivering and chattering to the red blaze. There were shapes and shadows everywhere, every twisting bough outside in the wild night was a swift advancing terror, every creaking door and rattling window the footfall of a messenger. She ached with the cold and fear and fatigue.

She was feeling her way dumbly now toward the line she must take with Tom. She must think nothing, see nothing, hope nothing except what was for him; that must be the controlling element of every word, every look even, everything of whatever sort the moment should suggest giving him, whatever he brought her. She must forget herself—forget Barbara.

She heard his firm tread on the path, a quick

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crisp step on the porch. She flung wide the door in thankfulness.

Barbara's low cry of greeting brought no immediate response. He strode to the fire.

"Cold, isn't it, to-night?" She stooped and threw on another log, adjusting it to a nicety before she rose from her knees. His not speaking at once was so appalling she felt she dared not stand and look at him in the silence. The blaze flared up, lighting her face, giving it a strange oriency above her black gown; the heat brought out afresh the faint smell of ether from their clothing and she felt almost faint as he helped her to rise.

He folded his arms again, turning his back to the fire, knitting his brows heavily, his face almost inscrutable in the shadow.

She who knew this man so well, even now so near, so close to him as the lateness of the hour and their being alone together in her house brought them, could not tell what message he had brought; for it was a new Tom, a different man from the one she had ever known.

She must make haste to accommodate herself to this stranger, standing in her foyer, on the very stones of her pagan altar.

"She is awake. She will live," she heard him saying.

"I am so glad; I—" she choked for words,

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the effort of speech was colossal. She must wait for him to go on, she couldn't see the direction to take.

"It isn't much to be glad for," he gave her grimly.

She wavered a minute; what did he expect? Then she ventured, "Not for her."

A faint illumination shot into his face; that was it then—Helena.

He answered while she was still taking this in: "But for us. Oh, you understand! Blessed Barbara, you always understand."

She did not. *Us!*—was he suddenly gone mad?

She ventured forth, feeling her way: "It—it is everything," she announced finally.

He assented at once: "I can't see at all where we would have been if it had been—the other way."

She focussed on that. Then with sudden daring inspiration, "But I can."

Strangely enough, she seemed to have flung him, by that, high and dry out of the deep water in which he was deliberately floundering.

"Oh, but you are so wonderful. You *would*," was what he gave her in return, abstractedly staring at her.

To Barbara it gave the measure of his faith in her, a quite overpowering thing, while it sim-

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plified the matter under consideration to a severity that was almost ugliness. He summoned her loyalty to him and she came at once with fluttering banner, a splendid simulation of eager understanding in her face. He sat down opposite her now, half facing the fire, and she took a long look at him across the dancing shadows between them. The mutation was startling; he was almost at ease, ready for deliberate speech. In intense good faith he committed himself to the fullest.

"Barbara, I have wronged Helena deeply; I have failed to understand her and her needs. I haven't tried. This now, from now on—is my chance—my chance of salvation."

She received this with open hands. Yes, an increased clearness was making its effect noticeable with startling rapidity, in the outlines of things.

"It is my great chance. A man shouldn't ask more opportunity of life than this will give me. Barbara, this is the time God—the God you don't believe in—has taken a hand."

He was merciless, absolutely. How terrible these people were who believed in God!

He was almost oblivious to her now as he went on with fierce intensity:

"He takes a hand sometime, enters vitally

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into every one's life, into the disposition of their affairs."

She was trying to see now with his eyes; peace would not come to her until she did. How marvellously it had changed him, this view of his tragedy; it made it his most precious possession. He was positively hugging it to his heart.

"It is a clash of wills, a battle. But He wins; He has what is right prevail."

His mastery of himself and herself amazed her, she was like a child listening. She felt he was leading her on and up into some fastness he had long known but never taken her to explore, though journeying far together and into strange places. Struggling to join him on this high ground she could still not see the view so clear to his eyes; she went back a way to a more familiar place, when his long silence made the transition easy.

"It will be a great deal, will give you a great deal more than I or anything else could."

"No, Barbara. It is *you* who are giving. It is your beautiful unselfish love that has saved me—it has taught me. It is your love that will help me in the days and the years, to give Helena comfort, to make her happy. There in that still dark room is my work for the rest of my life. It is a temple about which all my devotion must centre, the best and all that is in me must be

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laid on that altar. That it will be worthy and worth while will be due to your love; it will sustain me and keep me."

There was one thing she *must* know; perhaps he did not know, but he must at least have a vague pale vision of the wonderful thing.

"Tell me, Tom, why did Helena decide for the operation? Why did she want to live?"

"God knows! I have thought about it—I can't make out. Perhaps she wanted to give me a chance."

"But *why?*" she persisted. "Why *should* she give you a chance?"

He shook his head and rose to go. She held him a moment, her hand on his arm, as they went to the door.

"Why?" he repeated.

Then out of her woman's knowledge, her great heart, she gave him the final consolation, her crowning sacrifice.

"Why but that she *loves* you?" was her question as he left her.

XXIX

"MISS BARNARD, I want to go home," Lisa was saying the day after Barbara had gone to the House in the Woods. She was standing in Ruth Anne's room, her face was white, her eyes swollen with weeping.

"Shut the door, Lisa, and sit down."

Lisa sat in the nearest chair, on the edge, leaning forward.

"Now what is it you want?" Ruth Anne asked to gain time. This was a terrible advantage to take of her while Barbara was away. Lisa was Barbara's. Nobody else ever interfered with her in any way and she adored Barbara as a dog his master and feared her as much. She had never dared to go to Mrs. Brewster with that demand to go home. Now she repeated:

"I want to go home."

Ruth Anne gave her the obstacle of silence, but Lisa was terribly in earnest and went on impulsively, while her listener felt that one softening look, one lift of her eye even, would send her into a torrent of weeping; she knew by her shrill intensity that she was trembling on the verge of it. If she thought by an unsympathetic lack of comprehension to still the outburst she reckoned

RUTH ANNE

without her Lisa, for no one knew better the readiness and depth of her tenderness for every suffering thing.

"I am sick for home, and for my people. I have been away so long—I can't stand it any longer—I want to go home. I want to see my mother and my father, and my sisters and their children. I can't live away from them. I ran away when I got into trouble (I went away to save them)—I can't stay any longer, I just *got* to go back." She was speaking fast; her voice filled with tears, breaking, rising and falling from shrill tones to husky words that choked her.

"You'll take the baby with you, of course?"

"No, no, I can't. I can't take the baby, Miss Barnard. It would kill my mother—my father would turn me out—they would none of them have me in their houses with the baby. Think of it, Miss Barnard, one of my sisters is a school-teacher; think how they would point their fingers at her—and they are all church members—they could not go to church or hold their heads up again. You don't know what it's like in a country town. They're so *moral*. Here everyone is so good to me and to the baby and don't seem to mind, but there—you don't understand. I can't—that's all—I can't. I want to go back to be with the girls, and go out with them, and *be* somebody and *live* again. Perhaps I can finish

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my work at the normal school and be a teacher still. Nobody knows. Think of that: what it would mean to me. I can't do anything there with the baby; they wouldn't have me to work in their kitchens even. I want to go back to my own home and my people and my own life—don't you understand?"

"But Lisalotte?"

"I can't take her—I can't take her. I can't face what's waiting for me with her in my arms. Good God, Miss Barnard, I wish you could know the months of agony before she came: skulking in the city streets, turning my face from the passer-by; going out early in the morning and coming back late at night, washing dishes in restaurants, bearing the taunts from vile cooks and waiters, turned out of lodging-houses—terrible, horrible words thrown at me every place I went. The first place I had Christian treatment was at the City Hospital. And I know what it will be again. I've seen women with babies in their arms, half-starved, walking the streets, searching for work—it's terrible!—the looks of the men, the hard bitterness of the honest women. The only women who have a heart for us are the ones you call bad."

"But you can stay here."

"I don't want to stay here," hoarsely, "I want to go home, and live, and marry and have

RUTH ANNE

a home of my own, and children with a *name*.
I——”

“Lisa,” Ruth Anne silenced her by the firm grip of her voice on that word, “you will never in the world, whatever you have, have anything again as fine as your child, so near to heaven. Don’t think that anything will ever recompense you for denying your child. Could you bear her and not love her? Can’t you feel the birth pain tugging at your heart when she cries, when she laughs, when she touches you with her hands? She should be the most wonderful and precious thing in the world to you. What you want for your own selfish happiness is nothing to what you owe her.”

Lisa was sobbing bitterly, rocking to and fro, her face buried in her arms.

“Lisa, Lisa, you’re giving up the best thing in the world. Don’t do it; I beg of you keep her a little longer. She’s so pretty and so good. Think about it——”

“I have thought about it all the time—there hasn’t been a day or an hour when I’ve forgotten it. If I kept her any longer, I couldn’t give her up. It’s hard enough now, but I know Mrs. Brewster and you will take care of her. I want to go now while Mrs. Brewster is away.”

“Do you know, Lisa, if Mrs. Brewster had a beautiful baby like Lisalotte all her own, she’d be

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so happy. It's her cross to bear that she *hasn't* a child, and you have her, that's *your* cross. Lisa, Lisa—" Ruth Anne was standing, all melting tenderness, her hand on Lisa's shoulder, " I can't let you go till Mrs. Brewster comes. She'd be very angry; you know she's responsible for you."

"I'd never go if I wait for her to come back. Mrs. Brewster's been so good to me; I can't go against her."

"Tell me what you are going to do."

She was silent. "I don't know—but I've got to leave the baby." This was the burden of her stubborn cry.

Ruth Anne was helpless; she could not stop her, she knew she could not dissuade her.

"Tell me, Lisalotte's father—who was her father? Tell me the truth."

Lisa stopped crying and answered quietly after a second's uncertain hesitation, "Our minister's son, home from college on his vacation. You see it would have ruined him, and his father too. He wasn't bad—we were only eighteen and—and both foolish, that's all. He said if I came back and everything was all right we could be married perhaps sometime."

"Lisa, you care more to marry him than for your child?"

"If I don't go back, he'll marry somebody else, I'm afraid. It's a year now—I must go back."

RUTH ANNE

The excuses I've been sending home and the lies won't last any longer; I've got to go now." She was white and stubborn, a dull fire in her eyes. She rose and went out with an air of finality.

Ruth Anne left her door open and listened, the house was still. Lisa would not go to-night, it was too late. Perhaps Barbara would be home to-morrow. She could not telephone her nor disturb her; one of the great crises in her life was taking place down there in the woods. Nothing must disturb her poise; she was needing it all, that was evident. She had wished to be alone—that meant for Barbara that the struggle was titanic. Ruth Anne had offered to go down and she had said no. So if the stars fell, she should not be disturbed. After all Lisa had to decide—had to meet her crisis rightly or wrongly as it was given her to see it; just as Barbara was meeting hers and fighting it out, and just as she herself had met hers and failed to conquer.

Next morning there was no Lisa, and Ruth Anne went about trying to find traces of her stealthy nocturnal departure. Lisalotte was as good and as happy as ever in her carriage on the nursery porch, in the crisp November morning. The only thing she found in her searching was pinned on the pillow of Barbara's bed, a little note written on Bishop's House stationery and addressed to Mrs. Brewster. She left it there on

RUTH ANNE

the pillow, brought in the baby and put her on the bed, shutting the door softly.

Just before twelve the motor drove up and Barbara came in. She looked pale, thin, chilled and ill; the modelling of her face seemed firmer, harder, her eyes more luminous, the exquisite refinement of recent and terrible sufferings and vigils hung about her. When she saw her, Ruth Anne knew that it was finished, that she was reconciled beautifully. There was a consecration all about her as about a veiled priestess of some mysterious rite.

In Ruth Anne's room Barbara told her:

"So you see, my dear—my life is finished. My romance is ended. Love has come to me and blessed me with the touch of heavenly wings and is gone. I have put it out of my heart. I've nothing there now, nothing at all, not regret nor anything."

"Come, come to your room," Ruth Anne threw open the door. The baby was still asleep. Barbara smiled sadly,—

"Lisalotte," she whispered.

"Yes, there's a message for you," Ruth Anne closed the door.

"A message for me?"—From Ruth Anne of course, on the pillow, some little love message; she often found them pinned there when she came in. Well, she still had Ruth Anne and

RUTH ANNE

Bishop's House— She stepped softly, not to awaken Lisalotte—it was not Ruth Anne's writing— She tore it open listlessly, vaguely wondering.

DEAR MRS. BREWSTER:

I am going home to my people and to Lisalotte's father. I cannot take her—I give her to you. I will never claim her from you; I hope she will make you happy. You have been an angel from heaven to me. I came to you hating everyone, even my baby. You have taught me how to be happy, and to know what love is. God bless you.

LISA.

As Barbara read, tears filled her eyes, she could hardly see, her white drawn face became soft and sweet. She held the letter tight and knelt beside the bed, reaching out her hands on the sleeping child. Her hands were not empty now.

She stood at the threshold of the temple calling,

"God . . . Are you there? Can you hear? God!"

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It was damnable, damnable, Ruth Anne kept repeating as Barbara's story took hold of her.

It was all wrong, this not daring to face life, to face one's needs, this fear of demanding what one wanted.

There were moments of high opportunity to be taken advantage of, psychical moments with the magic powers of fusion. Had not her mother said so? Was not all her mother's message to her, a call to her soul to dare, to go forth and seize the treasures of life while they were at hand lest they be quite carried by and beyond her reach by the swift-rushing current?

She was filled with rebellion, bitter unreasoning rebellion, at sight of Barbara's suffering. Barbara's punishment was too great, she did not deserve it. Her loneliness and misery were a lesson to her, a beautiful but terrible lesson; it should not be without a brave attempt to seize it that life's treasure should be carried by her and out into trackless wastes. She didn't know how other people got things, who did get them, unless by force of arms.

Suppose she failed. Suppose it was not *for* her, the wonderful almost sacred thing she de-

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sired with all her being— Oh, it was better to have tried than to sit all her years with the coward heart that had not dared; the poet, whoever he was, was quite right about it.

She took her resolution swiftly. To-day she would do it. At once. Now.

She must know, she could not wait; such issues were at stake, more than her life, more than anything.

She had seen what life was without love; it was emptiness, bitterness, suffering. She would not have it so. She would fight with every bit of her strength for what she wanted.

She could not ask Barbara's advice. She must put her theory to the test before she told her. She might fail. What if she should fail? The chances were that she would. It was a strange errand for a woman, to go and tell a man she loved him, in just so many words. Perhaps something would happen that she wouldn't have to—some miracle. But no, she dared not think of that, that would be too blessed. She was not really worthy of such special favoritism from the high gods. If she got what she wanted, at any price, she must be grateful and humble. Yes, she must go with humility, so much humility all her days. She would make a bargain with God to be, oh so good, if He would give her what she wanted to-day. She wondered if it was

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quite honest to try to bribe God, to ask Him to throw the weight of His influence on her side. Her God was a very personal God, always tangible and near, though fearsome. After all, it wouldn't be fair to ask God to help her. No, perhaps God wanted her to suffer, perhaps He didn't approve of this material happiness she was so madly seeking. Oh no, the world, His world, couldn't go on if everyone was to live and suffer like Barbara. He must intend it to be the other way.

In breathless haste she began dressing, pulling gowns and coats and hats and furs about, criticising, selecting, shaking her head,—this was not smart enough, another thing not becoming enough, one thing was too sombre for the high occasion, something else too gay. She never remembered in all her life before, caring so much what she put on or how it became her.

Of course he wouldn't notice, he wasn't the kind of man who saw clothes, he saw only what was inside people's heads and hearts; but she would feel better, have more confidence in herself, be more at ease to know she looked her best. She was pale still and almost thin, but that didn't matter; she would have color enough once she got there, with her blushes, unless—horrible thought—she lost her nerve and went white altogether. But she wouldn't, that was impos-

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sible. She had faced fears and terrors and *him* before, and not been annihilated.

Suppose he was merely kind, tolerant, superior? Oh, but that would be horrible. He could not be that, he must meet her on terms of equality; love would make that demand, its right to dignity and reverence.

It was two o'clock—she must hurry. Sometimes he did not stay long at the office. Hurrying, she finished dressing, threw on her furs and went out of the house.

The air was filled with snow, soft little crystals that fell upon her and melted, feeling delightfully cool on her hot face. She realized on her way down in the car that she ought to have telephoned, he might even now be gone. But then, if by some chance he had answered the call himself what would she have said? She might not even have been able to speak to him; she recalled her terror of the days of Barbara's illness.

She must not lose her courage now; she smiled, looking about her,—suppose these people in the car knew what she was going to do. That she, Ruth Anne Barnard, resident of Bishop's House, was going down to a man's office to tell him she loved him. How curiously they would regard her, with what intensity of interest! But there she sat among them, her heart

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full of this thing, and they didn't know anything about it—maybe they had wonderful things in their hearts too, things that gripped them and made them speechless.

The haughty person said that Dr. Hollander was going out of town, leaving almost at once to catch a train. He would not be able to see her to-day.

"I know," she answered readily with sudden inspiration, "He's going to the Lawrences at Parkwood. There's a later train," she said with assurance. The haughty one's severity softened. "It's very important—I must see him."

She waited, wondering. Suppose he wouldn't see her? Well, she would come again. Suddenly the immensity of her folly dawned upon her, smote her. She was foolish, like a child wanting a star. She had picked out the most glorious one in all the firmament and was coming to demand it.

The doctor's secretary was holding the door open.

"Dr. Hollander will see you now."

She stepped inside, the door closed after her. She felt suddenly as though thrown from a height into space, falling, falling— She reached out to stay herself.

Dr. Hollander came to her in a quick rush, caught her up, held her firmly.

RUTH ANNE

"My dear Miss Barnard!" He was holding her trembling hands.

"Doctor—I'm—I'm all right now. I——"

She was trying so hard to be sensible, to get her head again.

"Yes, yes. You shouldn't have come down," he said sternly. "You're not strong yet. I would have come." His face was serious, absorbed, bending over her, but his eyes strangely brilliant as she looked at him. Why was he looking at her like that?

"But—it was something I couldn't ask you to come for—it isn't because I'm ill; it's something—something personal. It's very hard to tell you." If he would just go on holding her hands, she could tell him in a minute now, she would have courage.

But he dropped her hands, turned once or twice about the room and came back. She leaned her head against the chair, almost faint again. She could not say it; she would never be able to say it. She knew that now. How could she have dared? He was so terrifying. He was looking at her now and she returned his gaze, her lips apart, hoping still the words would come.

"I came to tell you something—but I find I can't. I'm afraid—" she heard herself faintly say.

"Perhaps you can write it," he said gently.

RUTH ANNE

"Yes, yes, I could write it. I'm sorry I've troubled you. Yes, that would be best." She was rising, her hand on the door.

"Miss Barnard, come back." There was an imperative note in his voice that thrilled her. "Tell me what you came for. You shall—I want to know."

She lifted her eyes to him; surely they would tell him. Her lips were trembling, she felt on the brink of some unfathomed pool looking into fearful depths, and then he was holding her, so close, she could feel his heart-beat.

"Miss Barnard, Ruth Anne, Darling!"

"Yes; that—that is it," she murmured breathless again. He had in his face the adoring look she had so long coveted, but it was for *her*, for *Ruth Anne*, oh, she was sure now.

"That is what I came—" she was repeating quite unconsciously.

"To have me tell you," he went on.

"Yes," she laughed.

"That I love you," he finished.

"Yes," she sighed, her ship almost in port.

"Do you love no one else? Do you see no face but mine?"

"I haven't seen anyone but you, my darling, for ages and ages."

THE END

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